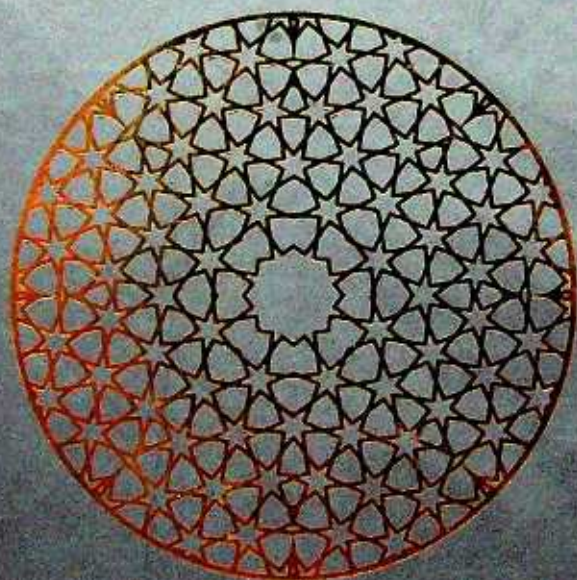


VOLUME 4

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



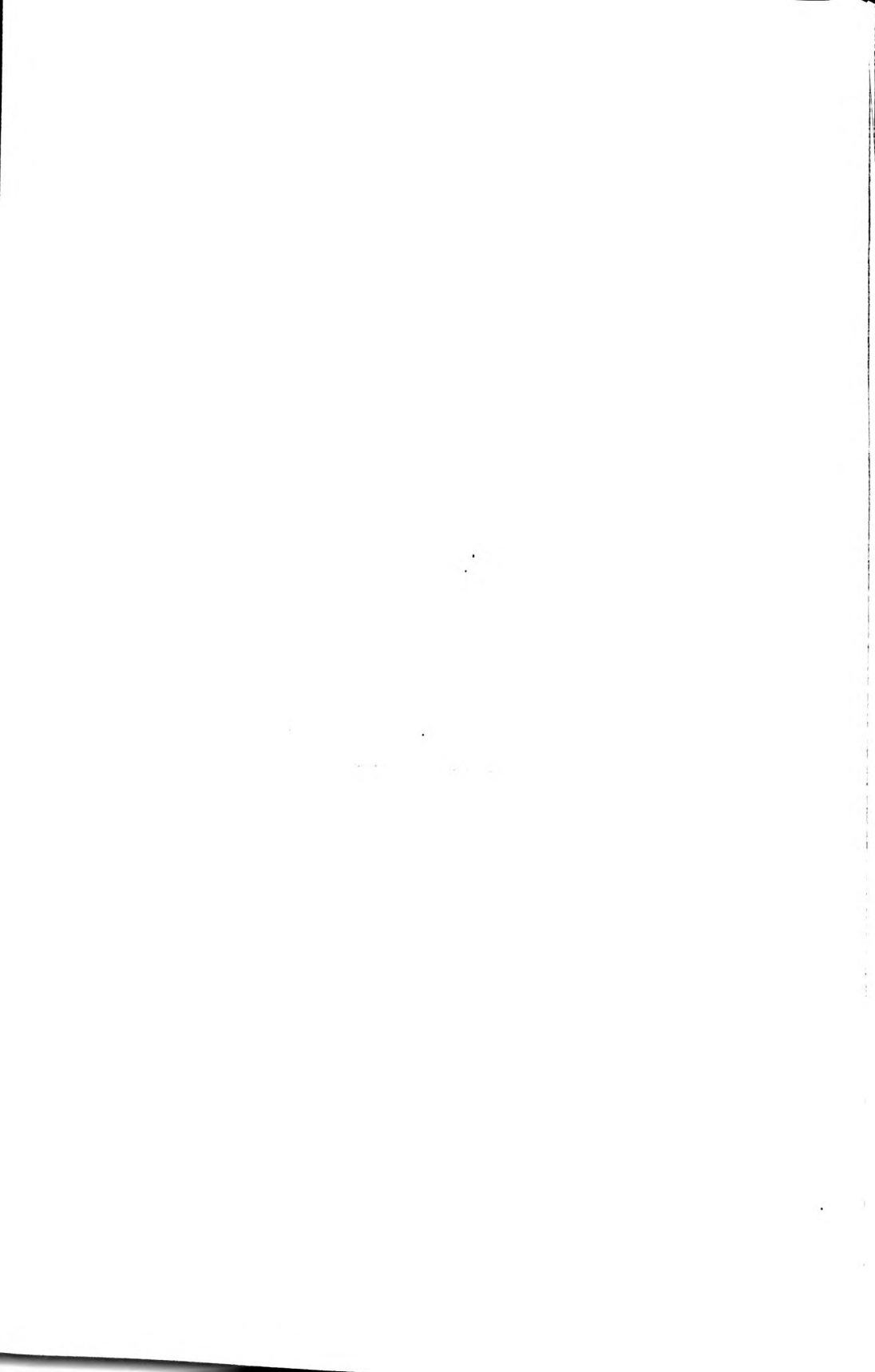
IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON TRUTH

TRANSLATED BY KHALID WILLIAMS

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON TRUTH comprises treatises that are most concerned with the nature of truth and falsehood, the degree to which human beings can identify truth, and the means by which they may seek it and identify and counter falsehood: *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (the autobiographical “Deliverance From Error”), *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* (“The Just Balance”), *al-Madnūn bih ‘alā ghayr ahlih* (“Knowledge to be Withheld from the Unqualified”), and *Faysal al-tafriqa* (“The Criterion of Distinction”). Al-Ghazālī investigated questions of true and false beliefs in all of his works, such as *Tabāfut al-falāsifa* (“The Incoherence of the Philosophers”), *Mi‘yār al-‘ilm* (“The Standard of Knowledge”), and *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (“The Revival of Religious Sciences”); and in the shorter treatises the author sometimes refers the reader to these longer ones.

Imam Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) is unquestionably among the foremost figures in the spiritual literature of Islam—and indeed of the entire world. Until now, however, many of his writings have only been accessible to those able to read Arabic. With the appearance in fluent English translations of this collection of Imam al-Ghazālī’s shorter treatises, Ihya Publishing has taken an important step to fill the gap.

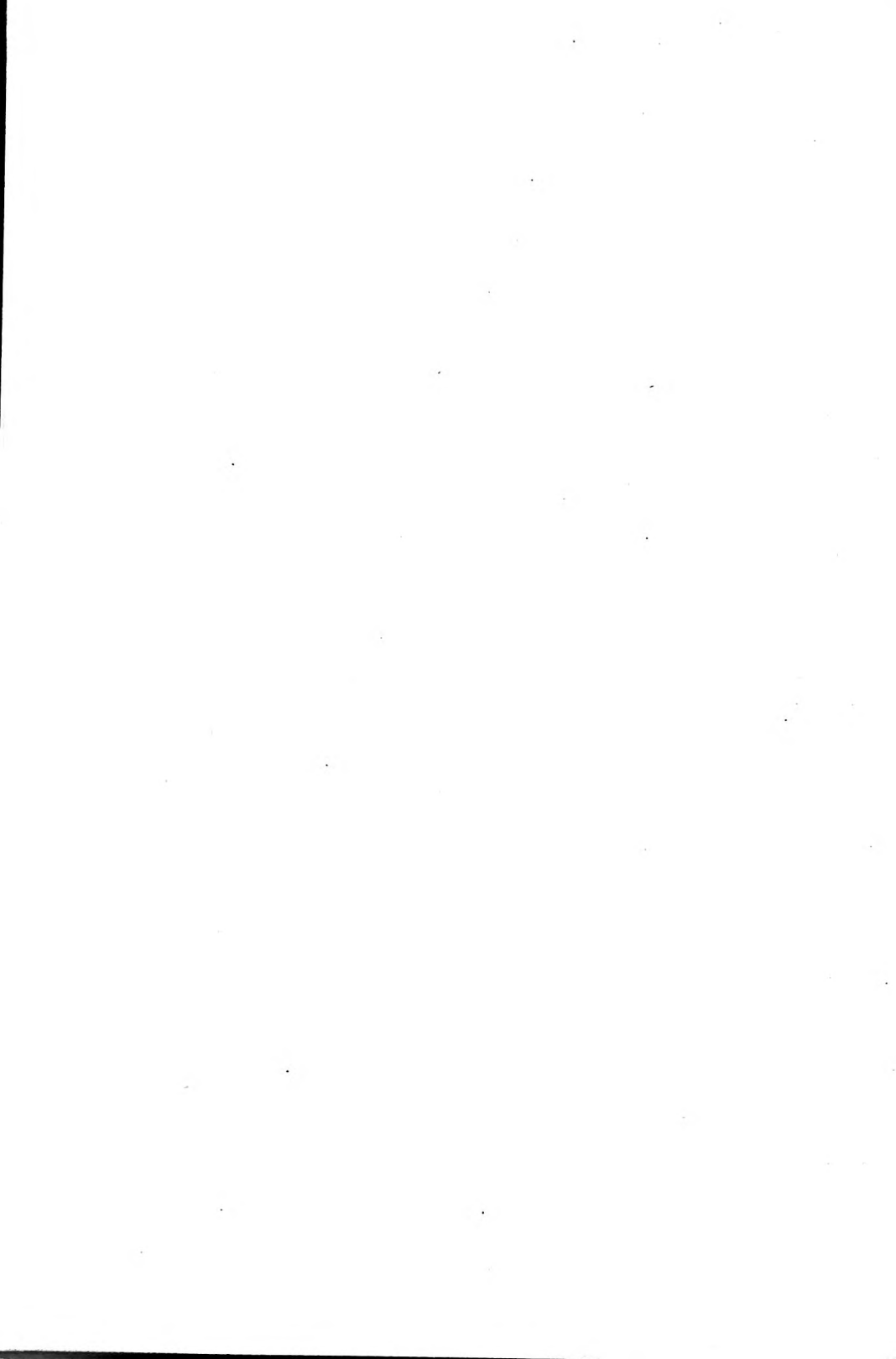




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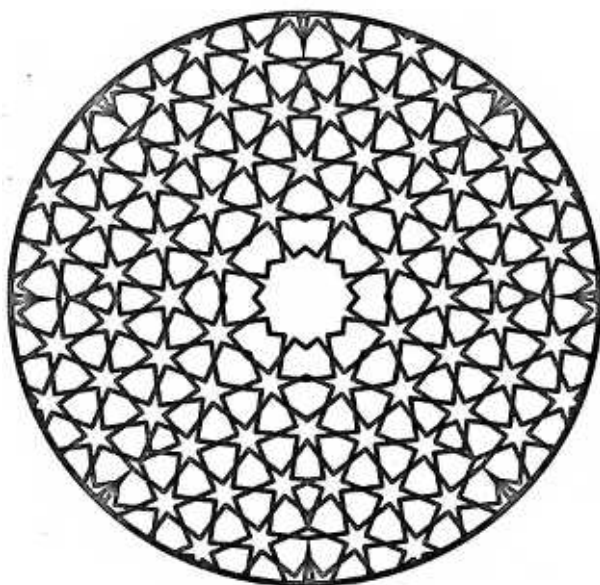
*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON TRUTH



VOLUME 4

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON TRUTH

TRANSLATED BY KHALID WILLIAMS

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*Whoever determines the truth from people alone will remain
lost in the plains of bewilderment. Rather, know the
truth, and you will know its people.*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ

TRANSLITERATION KEY

• (i) ' (A slight catch in the breath. It is also used to indicate where the <i>hamza</i> has been dropped from the beginning of a word.)	ق q (A guttural <i>q</i> sound with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ا a, ā	ك k
ب b	ل l
ت t	م m
ث th (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>thin</i> or <i>thirst</i> .)	ن n
ج j	و, ū, u.
ح h (Tensely breathed <i>h</i> sound.)	• h
خ kh (Pronounced like the <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	ي y, ī, i
د d	سalla 'Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam—used following the mention of the Messenger Muhammad, translated as, "May Allāh bless him and give him peace."
ذ dh (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>this</i> or <i>that</i> .)	'Alayhi 'l-salām—used following the mention of a prophet or messenger of Allāh, translated as, "May the peace of Allāh be upon him."
ر r	Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhu—used following the mention of a Companion of the Messenger, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with him."
ز z	Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhā—used following the mention of a female Companion of the Messenger ﷺ, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with her."
س s	Rahimahu 'Llāh—used following the mention of a scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on him."
ش sh	Rahimahumu 'Llāh—used following the mention of more than one scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on them."
ص ṣ (A heavy <i>s</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ض ḍ (A heavy <i>d/dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ط t (A heavy <i>t</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ظ z (A heavy <i>dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ع 'a, 'i, 'u (Pronounced from the throat.)	
غ gh (Pronounced like a throaty French <i>r</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ف f	



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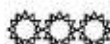
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*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON TRUTH

In *Imam al-Ghazālī On Truth* we have selected the texts from the author's collected treatises that are most concerned with the nature of truth, the degree to which human beings can identify it, and the means by which they may seek it. Naturally, this also requires an examination of truth's opposite, falsehood, and how it is to be identified and dealt with. Al-Ghazālī investigated these subjects throughout his writing career, particularly in books such as *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), *Mī'yār al-'ilm* (*The Standard of Knowledge*), and *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of Religious Sciences*), to which he sometimes directs the reader in the treatises presented here. Some truths are communicated by Revelation and cannot be arrived at by reason; others are accessible by means of discursive thought, for which Revelation provides standards; others still are experiential and must be tasted, since a mere description is no substitute for the reality. In these treatises, al-Ghazālī guides us through these questions and shows us how to proceed further on our own.

Deliverance From Error (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*)

In this autobiographical treatise al-Ghazālī describes the spiritual crisis that led him to resign from teaching at the prestigious Nizāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad and exchange his life as a celebrated scholar for that of a wandering ascetic. He describes the process of transformation that he underwent in those years and how he was finally able to put his intellectual and spiritual concerns to rest; and he explains why he decided to return to public life after eleven years in obscurity.

Before beginning this autobiographical account, the author lays the ground for it with a summary discourse on the nature of knowledge and the means by which it is sought. After describing the personal realization that led him to dismiss an attitude of sophistry and the nihilistic denial of the human capacity for knowledge altogether, al-Ghazālī posits that the human search for knowledge can be categorized into four approaches, or methods: discursive reasoning, infallible instruction, logic, and mysticism. These are pursued respectively by the theologians, the philosophers, the Bāṭinis and other similar cultists, and the Sufis. The author describes his personal journey of discovery through these approaches to knowledge and what he learned from each of them.

Al-Ghazālī dispenses with theology swiftly in this section, noting that although the rise of the *Kalām* tradition was necessary in order to combat heresy and misunderstanding, its usefulness is limited and there will always be those who find it lacking and are dissatisfied with the answers it offers. In the section on philosophy, he summarizes some of the arguments he had earlier made in the *Incoherence*; but he also warns against rejecting philosophy altogether, since much of its content is useful and unobjectionable. When discussing the "infallible teaching" of the Bāṭinī sect, the author describes his encounters with them and how, before

beginning the work of refuting them at the behest of the Caliph, he had been dissatisfied with the quality of the arguments against the sect which had so far been produced by the Muslim orthodoxy. The reason, al-Ghazālī argues, was that those who sought to refute them did not understand what they were refuting because they had not undertaken a comprehensive study of it. Al-Ghazālī acknowledges that, although doing so can be dangerous because it risks affording greater prominence to their misleading doctrines, it is necessary if those doctrines are to be rebutted. He then summarizes his rebuttals of the Bāṭinī (Ismāʿīlī) sect, of which more will be seen in *The Just Balance*.

The author then turns to Sufism, describing his early encounters with it and what he learned from the writings of its renowned masters. He insists that although those writings are helpful in gaining a theoretical understanding of the Sufi path and its fruits, "the true kernel of their teaching is something that cannot be reached by study, but only by direct 'tasting' (*dhawq*), experience, and moral transformation." This concept of *dhawq* is central to the message of the *Deliverance* and is a major theme in al-Ghazālī's later works. He recalls how it was his realization of its pivotal importance that spurred him to bid farewell to his comfortable life as a respected scholar, and head out in search of true understanding.

Having explained at length the circumstances that led to the culmination of his crisis and his decision to make this break, al-Ghazālī then gives a brief account of his travels in the Levant and the Hejaz, and how he returned home much earlier than he had expected but then continued to live in isolation as though abroad for the next ten years, persisting with his spiritual journey until he found the *dhawq* that he had been seeking. By definition, this is not something he can describe for us, and so instead he elects to tell us of another of the realizations he had during this time, namely the true nature of Prophethood. Al-Ghazālī describes this

nature as a further stage of perception lying above and beyond touch, sight, discernment, and intelligence. Some of the properties of this stage of perception can be described, but others are accessible only through *dhawq*, and cannot be set down in words. For those who wish to experience them, the author invites them to tread the path that he has trodden.

Al-Ghazālī ends the treatise by explaining his reasons for emerging from his self-imposed obscurity and returning to teaching. Alarmed by the spiritual and intellectual malaise he saw around him, he realized that he could not in good conscience keep the illumination he had attained to himself. Now in or approaching old age, by the standards of his times, he was obliged to share it with the world and do his utmost to rouse his fellow Muslims from their slumber. The title of the Imam's magnum opus *The Revival of Religious Sciences* speaks to this vocation, and many who came after al-Ghazālī have considered him to be the fifth *Mujaddid*, the Renewer of Islam who the Prophet ﷺ foretold would appear at the turn of each century. The author's aim in works of this type is to inspire his readers to embark upon the quest for *dhawq*, so that religion becomes not merely something that they know or that they do, but something that they experience in the very core of their being.

The Just Balance (*Al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*)

In his major works on logic, *Mihakk al-Nazar* (*The Touchstone of Reason*) and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* (*The Standard of Knowledge*), al-Ghazālī takes a broadly formal Aristotelian approach to the subject, with adaptations and modifications here and there. In *The Just Balance*, the author offers his own novel model of logic derived directly from the Qur'ān, presented in the form of a dialogue with a proponent of the Bāṭinī or esoterist school who challenges the

author to provide an alternative to profane "reasoned opinion (*ra'y*) and analogy (*qiyās*)" other than blind conformity to an infallible Imam. As the author affirmed in *Deliverance from Error*, the philosophical approach to logic is only blameworthy when it strays outside its scope and attempts to supplant revelation with reason; the basic tenets of logic themselves are true and of value. Yet because the science of logic is conventionally associated with irreligious philosophical enquiry, al-Ghazālī presents these tenets to his interlocutor in purely Qur'ānic terms, offering for each principle a passage of the Qur'ān that comprises an argument in that register. Some of the author's Qur'ānic paradigms for these logical tenets are straightforward, while others are challenging and surprising. All of them exemplify al-Ghazālī's consistent and exacting approach and his palpable desire to encourage his interlocutor, and by extension his readers, to think for themselves and follow these arguments step by step to their logical conclusions.

Knowledge to be Withheld from the Unqualified
(*al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ḡhayr ahlih*)

Al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ḡhayr ahlih is one of the treatises in the collection whose attribution to al-Ghazālī is less certain. Ibn al-Šalāḥ and al-Subkī considered it to be inauthentic. Ibn Taymiyya disagreed and argued that the book's style and content are a perfect match for al-Ghazālī's other works, and that those who denied its authenticity only did so in order to protect the Imam from the criticisms leveled at the work. The difficulty is compounded for us, however, since none of those figures quoted directly from the *Maḍnūn* when discussing it, and it is not clear which treatise they were actually referring to. In his other works, al-Ghazālī refers to his "*Maḍnūn* (withheld) books" in the plural, rather than to a single text. One early manuscript, which is apparently preserved at Marāgha in

Iran and bears the title *al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ghayr ablih*, is simply an extract from al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*The Aims of the Philosophers*); this may explain why Ibn Taymiyya identified it as his writing, but would not explain why Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ and al-Subki rejected it.ⁱ Perhaps such controversies were only to be expected over a work explicitly declared to be "withheld" and intended only for a select readership.

In any case, the treatise presented here is the one more commonly known by that name and found in several manuscripts. Al-Ghazālī dedicates the work to his brother Aḥmad, and divides it into four parts: the first on the Divine Lordship, the second on the angels, the third on the nature of miracles, and the fourth on death and the Afterlife. In none of these parts does the author set out to present comprehensive discussions of the subject. Rather, this partition is a way of thematically grouping the varied topics that the author tackles in the treatise. This is evident from the outset: Part One begins with a brief discussion on the meaning of the Qur'ānic phrase "the Days of God" (*Ayyām Allāh*) and what exactly time means when applied to the divine, and then proceeds through commentaries on various verses of the Qur'ān, the meaning of divine provision, the nature of visions and particularly the vision of God in dreams, the divine Oneness and Absolute Independence, the divine Attributes in general, and the nature of God's commandments to man. The common theme running through all these topics is the difficulty that finite human intelligence has in comprehending the divine infinitude—or what in general terms might be called the tension between the finite and infinite planes of being. Al-Ghazālī returns here, as he does frequently throughout his writings, to the hadith "God Most High created Adam in His

i See Badawī, *Mu'allafāt* pp. 151–155; Pourjavady, Nasrollah, *Majmū'a-yi Falāsifi-yi Marāgha: A Philosophical Anthology from Marāgha* (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 2002, p. v.

own image." He shows how some of the Attributes of God are found in man, while others are exclusive to Him—meaning that only God can know God, and that man's knowledge of God is gained through the prism of man himself.

One of the major unifying themes of the treatise as a whole is the attempt to provide rational or intellectual proofs for the articles of faith that are generally known through Tradition and Revelation. In this discussion of the nature of God's commandments, al-Ghazālī argues that the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter are not arbitrary but are the inevitable consequences of human actions, and that this causal relationship is an aspect of the nature of God Himself. "Asking why sin leads to punishment is like asking why living beings die from poison, or why poison causes death." He then provides rational arguments for other fundamental religious beliefs, such as Resurrection, Prophethood, and the existence of the angels. This last topic is discussed further in Part Two, where the author examines the meaning of the angelic and demonic consorts that are assigned to every human.

In Part Three al-Ghazālī addresses the subject of miracles and their three different categories, tangible, mental, and imaginal, explaining their nature and providing examples. He then turns to the issue of intercession, which he expounds by recourse to analogy, comparing it to light reflecting on water to reach areas that otherwise it would not reach.

In Part Four al-Ghazālī examines certain issues relating to death and the Afterlife, including punishment or reward in the grave, the Resurrection, the return of the soul to the body, the Reckoning, and Paradise. In the course of doing so, the author addresses such questions as the nature of cyclical time and how it may be interrupted, the difference between procreation and spontaneous generation, and the universal Balance (*Mizān*) of the cosmos, which consists of points of extremity with middle

points between them. Here again, the objective is to reconcile the undeniable proclamations of Revelation with the conclusions and possibilities of philosophical and rational enquiry, so as to create a synthesis satisfying to the enquiring mind that wishes to give both their due. In describing Paradise al-Ghazālī again refers to the three categories of tangible, mental, and imaginal, this time with regard to otherworldly pleasure. In his view, the most powerful of these is the imaginal, which is “extensive beyond confinement or withholding.” It is as vast as the imagination itself, which, as he noted in the *Ascensions*, has been granted the power to perceive the whole cosmos as being the size of a coin.

The Criterion of Distinction (*Fayṣal al-tafrīqā*)

This treatiseⁱ is al-Ghazālī’s answer to a colleague who was troubled by criticisms leveled at the author’s writings by certain figures who accused al-Ghazālī of straying from the Ash‘ari school—something which in their view was “tantamount to unbelief.” Al-Ghazālī is untroubled by this accusation, but agrees to indulge his colleague by providing an overview of the definition of faith and unbelief. After first condemning extremism in adherence to schools of thought, he sets about establishing and elaborating on his definition, which is as follows: “unbelief (*kufr*) is to deny anything that the Messenger ﷺ conveyed, and faith (*īmān*) is to believe everything that he conveyed.” In order to give more depth to this definition, al-Ghazālī then turns to the question of what it means to believe in something, whether literally or figuratively. He defines the different levels at which a thing can be said to exist, and how this relates to belief in the things described by Revelation. He then turns to the question

i Dr Sherman Jackson provides a historical and theoretical introduction to this treatise, as well as an annotated translation of the text, in *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

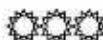
of what it means to "deny" Revelation, and how this relates to figurative interpretation. He discusses the rules of interpretation with references to the tenets established in *The Just Balance*. He shows where the line falls between reasonable and unreasonable interpretations, and affirms that a strong stance must be taken against unreasonable interpretations, meaning those which "alter the literal meaning of a text without decisive rational proof."

Although al-Ghazālī takes a firm stance against heresy and unfounded interpretations of Revelation, especially the excesses of the philosophers, he advises the reader to be cautious and refrain from leveling accusations of unbelief against anyone who prays towards the Qibla and professes the tenets of faith. "Accusing others of unbelief is a dangerous matter, while holding one's tongue presents no danger." The author refers to three fundamental doctrines—belief in God, in His Messenger, and in the Last Day—together with acknowledgement of the divine Law, as constituting the essential, inviolable tenets of faith. The denial of secondary matters of faith may be a gross error, but is to be distinguished from unbelief. The author notes that accusations of unbelief are very difficult to investigate, and only the foremost experts in the religious sciences may do so. The rest of us ought to hold our tongues, because "The temptation to wield knowledge as a weapon is an instinctive part of human nature, and ignorant people are unable to resist it. That is why there is so much disagreement among people. If only people were able to restrain themselves from wading into topics on which they are uninformed, disagreement would be rare."

Al-Ghazālī then turns once more to the question of theological extremism, and castigates those scholars who hold the Muslim masses to unnecessary standards and expect a degree of theological learning in them that is neither possible nor, in his view, even desirable. Rational proofs ought to be treated as medicine and dispensed only to those in need, not handed out to all and sundry,

where they do more harm than good. This is a frequent theme in the author's later works. What matters to al-Ghazālī is vibrant faith, not dry speculation.

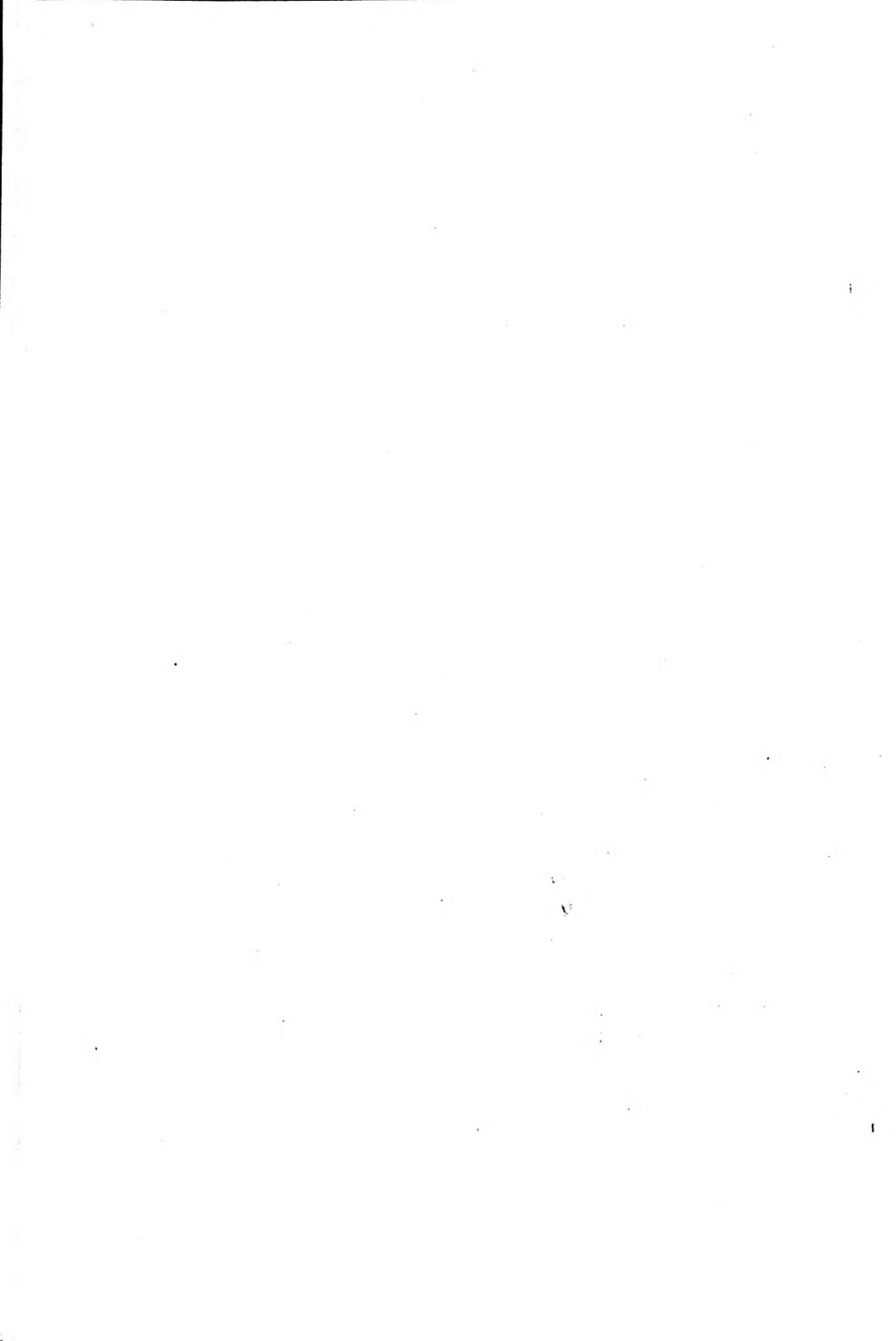
Finally, the author reminds the reader of the vastness of God's mercy, and that the believer should always be hopeful of the best from God, for both himself and his fellow men. Even those non-Muslims whose assessment of Islam is inevitably warped by their lack of accurate information, and perhaps by having encountered only smears and distortions regarding Islam, may well be embraced by this mercy; so why should a Muslim go looking for reasons why it should be denied to his fellows? The author urges us to remember that judgment falls to God and not to human reasoning, and that God's mercy outstrips His wrath.





DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR

Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, with Whose praise every treatise and statement begins. May blessings and peace be upon Muḥammad, the Chosen Prophet and Messenger, and upon His Family and Companions, the guides who lead us out of error.

My brother in the faith, you have asked me to provide you with a survey of the purposes and mysteries of the sciences, and the dangers and depths of the schools of thought. You wish me to recount to you the difficulties I endured in my effort to glean the truth from among the confusions of contending sects, and to clarify for you the various methods and paths by which it may be sought, and how I was able to climb from the pit of blind conformity (*taqlid*) to the peak of insight. You would like to hear firstly what I learned from the science of theology (*kalām*); secondly, my objections to the way of "Infallible Teaching" (*Ta'lim*),ⁱ which restricts the apprehension of truth to unquestioning conformity to the Imam; thirdly, my disagreements with the approaches of philosophy; and finally, my positive sentiments regarding the Sufi

i See page 37.

way. You wish to know what prime truths came my way in the process of scrutinizing people's statements; why I gave up teaching in Baghdad despite my many students; and what led me to return to Nishapur after such a long time?

Seeing that your intention is sincere, I have decided to meet your request. I seek God's help, place my reliance in Him, ask success of Him, and take refuge in Him.

First you must know—may God Most High guide you to the truth in the best of ways—that the disagreements among mankind regarding religions and traditions, and then the differences among the leaders of the schools of thought within Islam and all their many factions and approaches, are a fathomless ocean in which most have drowned, and from which few have escaped with their lives. Every sect supposes that it alone is saved, and *every party exults in what they have* (Qur'ān 30:32). This was foretold to us by the Master of Messengers ﷺ, the Truthful, Supremely Honest One, who said, "My Community will splinter into seventy-three sects, only one of which will be saved" (Ibn Mājah 3992). What he foretold has almostⁱ come true already.

From my earliest manhood, before I had yet reached twenty, until my present age of over fifty, I have been plunging recklessly into this deep ocean without a thought for my safety. I have intruded into every dark crevice, tackled every problem, delved into every abyss. I have examined the doctrines of every sect and plumbed the secrets of every school of thought, in order to distinguish truth from falsehood and Sunna from heresy, and to identify the proponents of each. If ever I encounter a Bāṭinī cultist, I examine his cult. If he be a literalist (Zāhiri), I desire to learn any conclusions to which his literalism may have led him. If he be a philosopher, I

i One manuscript has "already come true" (*kān*) rather than "almost come true" (*kād*).

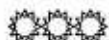
seek the nature of his philosophy. If he be a theologian, I strive to discover the implications and arguments of his theology. If he be a Sufi, I am eager to glean the mysteries of his Sufism. If he be an ascetic devotee, I investigate the ultimate fruits of his devotion. If he be an atheist, I scrutinize his position in an attempt to discover what has led him into atheism.

Ever since my early years, I have always had a thirst for knowledge of the true nature of things. It was instinctual in me, an aspect of the innate disposition into which God molded my character, not something I ever consciously chose. For this reason I broke free of the bonds of blind conformity and inherited beliefs not long after leaving childhood behind. For I observed how children always grow up to follow the religion of their parents, be they Christians, Jews, or Muslims. I heard the hadith related from the Messenger of God ﷺ in which he said, "Every newborn is born with [man's] primordial nature (*fitra*); it is the parents who make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian" (Bukhārī 1358). There arose within me a desire to know what that disposition truly is, and what the beliefs attained through conformity to parents and teachers truly are. How may one differentiate between such beliefs, which are based on principles that must be taught, in order to tell the true from the false? For there are all manner of disagreements about them.

I therefore told myself, "Since my goal is to know the true nature of things, the first thing I must do is ascertain the true nature of knowledge itself." It became apparent to me that certain knowledge is that whose object is revealed in such a manner that there is no longer any room for doubt or any possibility of error or illusion, and that the heart would not entertain any. Certainty must be so infallible that it could never be shaken by doubt or denial under any circumstances, even if it were challenged by someone with the power to transform a rock into gold or a staff into a serpent. For example, I know that ten is greater than three. If someone

said to me, "No, three is greater than ten, and I shall prove it to you by transforming this staff into a serpent," and then actually performed this feat before my very eyes, my knowledge would not be shaken in the slightest. I would certainly marvel at his talent and wonder how on earth he did it, but I would not doubt what I know to be true.

I then realized that if I knew anything with a lesser degree of confidence than this, my knowledge was neither trustworthy nor infallible; and if knowledge is fallible, it cannot be certain.





CHAPTER I

SOPHISTRY AND THE DENIAL OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Having arrived at this realization, I examined all my knowledge and found that I was entirely bereft of any that could meet this criterion, except for matters of sense-perception and self-evident truth. I concluded that in this despondent state, there was no use in considering any problems other than those of the most obvious kind, namely sensory matters and axiomatic truths. It was necessary to master these first in order to answer this question: Is the trust that I have in the evidence of my senses and the truths I hold to be self-evident no different from the trust I once had in the things I was taught by rote, or the trust that most people have in speculative matters? Or is it truly justifiable, beyond any suspicion or treachery?

I therefore set about earnestly contemplating sensory facts and axiomatic truths, wondering if I could bring myself to doubt in them. The result of this was that I found myself unable to trust in sense-perception either, and I entertained more and more doubts about it. Why is it that the senses are trusted? The most powerful sense is sight, yet when it sees a shadow standing still, it judges it to be stationary; but through experiment and observation, a while

later it knows that in fact it is in motion—not in sudden movements but in gradual increments that are infinitesimally small but are constant, meaning that in fact the shadow was never stationary at all. Likewise, the eye perceives the stars to be tiny, perhaps the size of coins, yet astronomical calculations prove that, in fact they are larger than the earth itself. In such matters, the senses judge according to their powers, but the intellect belies them and betrays them as liars, a charge against which they have no defense.

I therefore said that trust in sense-perception could not be justified either, and that perhaps nothing could be trusted but those intellectual truths that are first principles, such as that ten is greater than three, or that a single thing cannot be at once both affirmed and negated, nor both temporal and eternal, nor both existent and nonexistent, nor both necessary and impossible.

But sense-perception replied, "Why do you suppose that your trust in intellectual matters will be any different? You trusted in me once, but then your intellect came along and ruled against me. If not for the intellect, you would still believe in me. Perhaps another judge will come along and rule against the intellect, just as the intellect ruled against sense-perception. The fact that such a judge has not appeared does not prove that it is impossible."

For a while, my soul could not find a response. Sense-perception then drove the point further home by referring to dreams: "Is it not true that you believe certain things and imagine certain situations in your dreams, certain that they are real and entertaining no doubts about them for as long as you are in that state—and then you wake up, and realize that none of what you imagined or believed was actually real at all? Why, then, should you trust that anything you believe in the waking world is real, whether it is based on sensation or reason? They may well be true as long as you are in your current state; but what if you were to shift into another state that was to the waking world as the waking world

is to the world of dreams—a state in which the waking world would seem but another dream? If you did, you would conclude that all the things you apprehended with your intellect were but meaningless fantasies. Perhaps that state is the one that the Sufis claim for themselves; after all, they assert that in their ecstasies (*ahwāl*, sing. *bāl*), wherein they withdraw deeply into themselves and become absent from their senses, they witness things that do not accord with these intellectual principles.

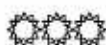
Or perhaps that [new] state is death: as the Messenger of God ﷺ said, “People are asleep; when they die, they awaken.”ⁱ Perhaps the life of this world is but a dream compared to the Hereafter, and when we die things will appear different to how they seem now, whereupon we will be told: *We have removed from you your covering, so today your sight is keen* (Qur’ān 50:22).

After all these thoughts had occurred to me and penetrated my soul, I attempted to find a solution, but nothing presented itself. There was no way to dispel the problem except by recourse to rational argument, and no way to construct an argument without recourse to intellectual principles; and those principles could no longer be taken for granted. The disease seemed incurable. For two months I was essentially a Sophist, though I did not call myself one, until at last God cured me of that disease and my soul was restored to health and equilibrium. Intellectual self-evident truths became trustworthy to me once more, and I accepted them as secure and certain. This was not the result of any rational argument or constructed discourse, but simply thanks to a light that God casts into my heart. That light is the key to most true knowledge. To think that unveiling (*kashf*) is dependent on rational proofs is to treat

i This saying has been attributed to many early Islamic figures including Imam ‘Alī, and is often cited as a hadith although it lacks a chain of transmission according to Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Irāqī in *Takhrij al-Ihyā’*, his guide to the sources of hadiths in Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’*.

God's expansive mercy as if it were narrow. When the Messenger of God ﷺ was asked about the meaning of "expansion" in God's words, *When God desires to guide someone, He expands his breast for submission [islām]* (Qur'ān 6:125), he replied, "It is a light that God Most High casts into the heart." When asked what the sign of this light is, he ﷺ replied, "To scorn the world of delusions, and to turn toward the world of eternal life."¹ In the same spirit, he ﷺ said, "God Most High created creation in darkness, then sprinkled some of His Light upon them" (Tirmidhī 2642). It is from this Light that unveiling should be sought; it shines forth at times from the divine generosity, and so one should continually be awaiting it. As the Prophet ﷺ said, "Throughout the days of your lives, your Lord sends breezes. You should expose yourselves to them."²

The point of these accounts is to understand that one must engage in the search with the utmost effort until one reaches the point of seeking the unseekable. To seek the absolute fundamentals is pointless, because they are already present; and if what is present is sought, it will become lost and hidden. He who is ready to seek the unseekable will not fall short in the search for what needs to be sought.





CHAPTER 2

THE CLASSES OF SEEKERS

After God Most High had cured me of that disease by His grace and favor, I came to believe that there are four kinds of seekers:

1. The theologians, who claim to be proponents of discursive reasoning;
2. The Bāṭinis, who claim to be proponents of "infallible teaching" (*ta'lim*) and take the divinely-protected Imam as their sole source of truth;
3. The philosophers, who claim to be proponents of logic and demonstration;
4. The mystics (Sufis), who claim to have been especially chosen for admittance into the divine Presence and endowed with mystical witnessing (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*mukāshafa*).

I told myself that the truth must lie with one of these four classes, for they are the ones who tread the paths in pursuit of it. If the truth has eluded them all, then there is no hope of finding it. Nor is there any use in returning to blind conformity once one has left it, for the conformist must not know that he is a conformist, or

otherwise his conformity will be shattered beyond repair. Shattered glass cannot be put back together, but only melted down and fashioned anew.

I therefore resolved to follow these paths and discover all that I could about these factions, beginning with the science of theology, then philosophy, then the "infallible teaching" of the Bāṭinis, then finally Sufism.

Theology

I began with the science of theology, and mastered it. I read the books of the most renowned theologians, and wrote a few of my own. I found that as a science, it successfully fulfilled its own objectives, but they were not objectives that I shared. The aim of theology is to preserve orthodox (Sunna) doctrine and to guard it from being tainted by heretical innovation. God Most High delivered to His servants, through His Messenger, a doctrine that is the truth and that assures the welfare of their religious and worldly lives, as is elucidated by the Qur'ān and the tradition. But for his part, Satan delivered teachings contrary to the Sunna by suggesting them to heretics, who proclaimed them and almost managed to tarnish the true doctrine altogether. Therefore, God Most High established the class of theologians, and inspired them to support the Sunna with systematic dialogues that laid bare the corrupt arguments of the heretical innovators and showed how they contravened the Sunna.

Thus, the science of theology was founded. Some of its proponents fulfilled the task to which God had called them, and excelled in defending the Sunna, protecting the true doctrine received from the Prophetic source, and setting right anything that had been touched by heretical innovation. However, in all of this they relied on certain precepts which they had taken from none other than their

rivals and been compelled to accept, whether by conformity, by the consensus of the Muslim Community, or by simple acceptance of the Qur'ān and tradition. Most of their efforts were concentrated on exposing the contradictions inherent in the arguments of their rivals, and defeating them by demonstrating the logical implications of the precepts they held in common.

Yet this will do little to convince someone who does not accept any truths at all, other than those that are self-evident. Theology was not enough for me, and it offered no cure for the illness from which I suffered. It is true that as the science of theology developed over time, its proponents did become interested in defending the Sunna by recourse to investigations into the true nature of things, and so entered into discussions of substances and accidents and their properties. Yet since this was not the primary objective of their science, they did not follow it to its ultimate conclusions, and therefore did not gain from it a way to dispel definitively the darkness of confusion that arises from divergent views among humankind. It is not that I deny that others than myself may have attained this; on the contrary, I do not doubt that some have attained it, if only in a manner that is tainted by blind conformity regarding certain matters that are not first principles. My purpose here is to tell my own story, not to denigrate those who have found their cures in this science. For the cure depends on the nature of the illness, and many a medicine helps one patient but harms another.

Philosophy

After finishing with theology, I turned next to the science of philosophy. I knew for certain that one cannot discover the corruptions that exist in a given science unless one first masters that science to the degree that one is the equal of any of its exponents, and then surpasses that level so that one can perceive depths and defects

that even the foremost proponents of the science have overlooked. This is the only way to be certain that one's judgments regarding the defects of the science are correct.

Now when it came to philosophy, I was not aware of any Muslim scholar of religion who had cared or aspired to plumb that branch of knowledge to such depths. The theologians did quote the philosophers in their books for the purpose of refuting them, but selected only obscure and complicated passages so obviously contradictory and unsound that no person of even average intelligence could be taken in by them, let alone someone claiming a refined education. I knew that to attempt to refute a school of thought without first understanding it and discovering its nature would be no more than a shot in the dark. I therefore set about earnestly acquiring that knowledge by reading books, studying privately without the assistance of a teacher. I devoted my free time to this pursuit, in between my roles as a writer and teacher of the religious sciences; this was when I was in Baghdad, imparting teaching and instruction to three hundred students. Through my simply reading those books in those stolen moments, God Almighty brought me to a full understanding of their teachings in less than two years. I spent a further year contemplating what I had learned, going over it and probing its depths, until finally I felt certain that I had identified its deceptions and misrepresentations, as well as the extent to which it touched on an accurate depiction of the truth.

I shall now provide an overview of the factions within this branch of knowledge, of which there are several, as well as their varying conclusions. It has many branches, but all of them are characterized by a general unbelieving and irreligious tendency, although there has always been a vast gulf between them across the ages, from ancient to more recent times, as regards to how close they came to the truth.

The Schools of Philosophy, and How Unbelief Characterizes Them All

There are many trends and factions among the philosophers, but they may be broadly grouped into three schools: the Materialists,ⁱ the Naturalists, and the Theists.

The first group, the Materialists, were a faction of the ancients who denied the existence of the All-Knowing, Omnipotent Creator and held that the world has always existed and always will, of its own power and without a creator, and that animal has always come from seed, and seed from animal, in an eternal cycle. Such people are devoid of faith."

The second group, the Naturalists, focused their attention on the study of the natural world and the wonders of animal and vegetable life. They took great interest in the science of anatomy and dissection, and in doing so they beheld the wonders of God's creation and the glories of His wisdom, which compelled them to admit the existence of a Wise Creator Who knows the true aims and purposes of things. Anyone who studies anatomy and observes the marvelous functions of the organs will necessarily become aware of the perfect design inherent in the bodies of living things, especially the human body. However, through their extensive study of nature they came to believe that equilibrium of the humors has a powerful effect on the function of the faculties of animals; that even a human's intellect is subordinate to his temperament; and consequently that it ceases to exist when his temperament does. It was therefore inconceivable to them that something nonexistent

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- i The Dahriyyūn, literally "temporalists" or "those who believe in time," as in Q. 45:24: *And they say, 'There is only our life in this world. We die and we live, and nothing but time destroys us.'*
 - ii *Zanādiqa*, plural of *zindiq*, is a word of unfixed meaning which is often used to mean "heretic," but for Ghazālī here it clearly means atheist or irreligious person.

could return to existence, and so they believed that the soul can never return once it has died. They denied the existence of the Afterlife—Paradise and Hell, Resurrection and Reckoning—and so did not believe that obedience is rewarded or sin punished. With nothing to restrain them, they sank into licentiousness and hedonism. Such people are also devoid of faith, for the root of faith is belief in God and the Last Day; and they deny the Last Day even if they do believe in God and His Attributes.

The third group, the Theists, came later and included Socrates, his pupil Plato, and Plato's pupil Aristotle. It was Aristotle who systemized their logic and refined their teachings, adding a greater degree of clarity than had existed previously, and bringing their thought to maturity. In general, they rebutted the previous two groups, the Materialists and Naturalists, and provided such convincing expositions of their defects that others were spared the task. *God spared the believers from fighting* (Qur'ān 33:25) by having them fight it out. Aristotle also rebutted Plato, Socrates, and other Theists before him, to such an extent that he broke out of their ranks altogether, although he did retain certain elements of their base unbelief and heresy from which he was not blessed with the ability to extricate himself. It is therefore necessary to declare them unbelievers, and to do the same for their partisans among the Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā,ⁱ al-Fārābī,ⁱⁱ and others; although none among the Islamic philosophers matched the achievements of these two in transmitting the teachings of Aristotle. The works of others who made the attempt are marred by mistranslations and confusions that render the text incomprehensible to the reader; how can one decide whether to accept or reject something that is incomprehensible? The totality of Aristotle's

i The Persian philosopher and polymath also known in the West as Avicenna (d. 427/1037).

ii The renowned Neoplatonist of Khorasan (d. 339/950).

philosophy as it has been reliably transmitted to us through these two men can be reduced to three categories: (1) what must be deemed unbelief; (2) what must be deemed heresy, and (3) what ought not be rejected at all. Let us now proceed to the details.

The Categories of Sciences

For our purposes, the sciences of the philosophers may be divided into six: mathematics, logic, natural science, metaphysics,ⁱ politics, and ethics.

(i) MATHEMATICS. This science is concerned with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, none of which have anything to say about religion, whether positive or negative. They are matters of demonstration which cannot be denied once they have been learned and understood. However, they have two drawbacks.

The first is that when anybody studies mathematics and marvels at its details and demonstrative proofs, this may cause him to develop a more favorable view of philosophy, being under the impression that it is every bit as cogent and demonstrably true as mathematics. He may also hear talk of how the philosophers are unbelievers who disparage and flout religious law. As a result, he may stray into unbelief by blind conformity, telling himself, "If religion were true, these people would not have overlooked it, considering the precision with which they practise their own science." Thus, upon hearing secondhand talk of their unbelief and irreligion, he deduces that unbelief and irreligion must be where the truth lies. I have seen many people stray from the truth on this pretext, without having any other basis for their decision.

i This is *ilāhiyyāt*, literally "divinity" or "theology." Aristotle sometimes uses the term "theology" to describe his metaphysics, but that term has been reserved here to translate *kalām* in the sense of religious theology in defence of orthodoxy. "Metaphysics" has therefore been preferred for *ilāhiyyāt*.

One might say to such a person, "An expert in one field is not necessarily an expert in every other. An expert on jurisprudence and theology is not necessarily an expert on medicine, nor is a person ignorant of intellectual matters necessarily ignorant of grammar. Every art has its practitioners who reach the highest levels of skill therein, even if they may be entirely incompetent in other fields. The principles of mathematics are demonstrative, while those of metaphysics are speculative. Only those who have studied the matter for themselves are aware of this."

Yet someone who has become an unbeliever through blind conformity will not find this argument acceptable, but will let himself be led by base desire, emotion, and the desire to appear clever, and persist in his deference to the philosophers in all matters of science.

This, then, is a major drawback of mathematics, of which all who mean to study those sciences must be warned. For although the subject is not directly connected to religion, the foundations it has in common with philosophy allow the evil ideas of that branch of knowledge to permeate it. Few are able to delve into it without becoming detached from religion and shedding the bridle of God-consciousness.

The second drawback arises from an individual who is well-disposed towards Islam but ignorantly supposes that the best way to defend it is to repudiate every science that has any connection with the philosophers at all. So he rejects their sciences and declares that they are entirely ignorant, even when they forecast solar or lunar eclipses; for he claims that their teachings contravene the sacred law. When he makes such assertions, those who know that these matters are scientifically proven hear him—and the result is not that they begin to doubt their proofs, but that they conclude that Islam must be based on ignorance and the denial of scientific proof, which makes them grow in love for philosophy and in hatred for Islam. Those who believe that Islam is helped by the rejection of

the mathematical sciences do a great disservice to the religion. The fact is that the sacred law says nothing whatsoever about such sciences, whether positive or negative, nor do the contents of these sciences contradict any religious teachings.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "The sun and moon are but two of God's signs; they do not eclipse because of anyone's death, nor anyone's life. If you see this, seek refuge in the remembrance of God Most High and in prayer" (Bukhārī 1040). This does not in any way oblige us to reject the science of arithmetic, by which the courses of the sun and moon and their conjunctions or oppositions may be measured in a particular way. As for the words sometimes appended to this hadith, "but when God manifests Himself to something, it submits to Him," they are not found in any authentic narration of it.

That, then, is the nature of mathematics, and those are its drawbacks.

(ii) LOGIC. This science too has nothing to say about religion, whether positive or negative. Rather, it pertains to the study of methods of demonstration and syllogism; the proper conditions for establishing premises for arguments, and the manner of assembling them; and the proper conditions for establishing definitions, and the manner of ordering them. The science of logic affirm that all knowledge is either conception (*taṣawwūr*), meaning that which is known by definition, or affirmation (*taṣḍīq*), meaning that which is known by demonstration.¹ There is nothing objectionable in this; in fact, it is no different to what the theologians and speculative thinkers say regarding demonstrative proofs, other than that they

i *Taṣawwūr* and *taṣḍīq* are important terms in Islamic philosophy. *Taṣawwūr* is somewhat akin to Plato's "ideas;" Ibn Rushd calls it "the thing itself" or "the image of a thing." *Taṣḍīq* (literally "to affirm something to be true") implies an assertion that can be proven true or false by demonstration. See Harry Wolfson, "The Terms *Taṣawwūr* and *Taṣḍīq* in Arabic Philosophy and their Greek, Latin and Hebrew equivalents" in *The Moslem World* 33 (1943), p. 114-128.

use different terminology to say the same thing, and that the philosophers elaborate their definitions and classifications more expansively. An example of their approach to the subject is the assertion that if all *As* are *Bs*, then some *Bs* must be *A*; for instance, if every human is an animal, then some animals must be human. They express this by saying, "a universal affirmative must have a corresponding particular affirmative." What does this have to do with the essentials of religion, such that it should need to be condemned and rejected? If it is rejected, the only result will be that logicians will assume that the one who rejects it must be unintelligent; worse still, they will form a low opinion of his religion, since he claims that he rejects their science on religious grounds.

It is true, nonetheless, that their science is tainted by a certain error. They acknowledge the necessary conditions under which an argument must be constructed, which are known to produce certainty without fail. Yet when it comes to religious matters, they are unable to be true to those conditions, and in fact are extremely lax with them. Moreover, logic has the same problem described above. A person may regard it favorably and judge it to be patently true, and consequently imagine that the ungodly beliefs of the philosophers are supported by those same proofs; hence they may stumble hastily into unbelief before even arriving at the metaphysical sciences. Thus, logic shares this drawback with mathematics.

(iii) **NATURAL SCIENCE.** This field is concerned with the investigation of the world of the heavens and celestial bodies and what lies beneath them: simple bodies such as water, air, earth, and fire, and composite bodies such as animals, plants, and minerals, and what causes their changes, transformations, and combinations. It is analogous to the science of medicine, which studies the human body, its major and subordinate organs, and the causes of its differing temperaments. Just as religion has no need to condemn medicine, it ought to have no reason to condemn natural science, except

when it comes to certain specific matters which I have detailed in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* ('The Incoherence of the Philosophers'). If any others prove to be objectionable, one will see upon reflection that they are included among those I listed there. All of them in essence come down to acknowledging that nature is entirely under the control of God, Exalted is He, and does not act of its own accord but is put to work by its Creator. The sun, moon, stars, and other natural phenomena are compelled by His command, and nothing of their activity proceeds from or of themselves.

(iv) METAPHYSICS. This is the field wherein most of [the philosophers'] errors occur, for in it they are unable to live up to the standards of argument they stipulate in their logic, and therefore there is much disagreement among them. Aristotle's approach in this field, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and al-Kindī, is fairly close to that of the Islamic philosophers. Their errors in the field come down to twenty fundamentals, of which three are outright unbelief and seventeen are heretical. I composed the *Incoherence* to refute their school by addressing these twenty points. The three points in which they differed from all Muslimsⁱ are as follows.

First, they deny the bodily resurrection, and assert that rewards and punishments in the Hereafter will be meted out to bodiless spirits, and that they are entirely spiritual and not bodily in nature. They are correct to assert that the spiritual element exists, since of course it does; but they are wrong to deny the bodily element, and in doing so they commit disbelief in Revelation. Second, they assert that God knows universals, but not particulars, which is also patent unbelief, for in fact *Not an atom's weight escapes Him in the heavens or in the earth* (Qur'ān 34:3). Third, they assert that

i Reading *Muslimin* (Muslims) rather than *Islāmiyyin* (Islamists) as given in some editions, since the author is referring to orthodox Muslim belief in general here, not the teachings of Islamic philosophers.

the world is eternal and beginningless. No Muslim ever believed any of these things.

As for their other views, such as their denial of the divine Attributes, their belief that God is Knowing in Essence rather than through a quality of knowledge that is something other than the Essence, and other similar concerns, their approach is similar to that of the Mu'tazila school; and the Mu'tazila must not be ruled unbelievers for holding such views. In *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wal-zandaqa* (*The Decisive Criterion Between Islam and Irreligion*), I have explained the dangers of being too hasty in hurling accusations of unbelief against those whose views differ from one's own.

(v) POLITICS. All that they say regarding this science comes down to the consideration of welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) as it pertains to matters of worldly affairs and governance. Their sources for this are none other than the Scriptures that God revealed to the Prophets and the wisdoms handed down from them across the ages.

(vi) ETHICS. Discourse on this science concerns the attributes and characteristics of the soul, an appraisal of their types, and the pursuit of a method of controlling and directing them. The source for this is the teachings of the mystics, the religious devotees who engage in perpetual remembrance of God Most High, combat their base desires, and follow the path to God by renouncing the pleasures of the world. In the course of their spiritual struggle, the mystics became aware of the characteristics and faults of the soul and the defects of its activities, and spoke of this openly. The philosophers then borrowed this and incorporated it into their own teachings, allowing them to dress up and popularize their nonsense. In their age, as in all ages, there were a number of godly people, for God—all Glory be to Him—never leaves the world bereft of them. They are the pegs that hold the earth in place, and it is through their blessing that mercy descends upon the people

of earth, as is stated in the Tradition wherein the Prophet ﷺ said, "By their means you are given rain, and by their means you receive provision."¹ The People of the Cave² were among their number, and they existed in the earliest eras, as the Qur'ān describes.

The incorporation of Prophetic and Sufi teachings into books on philosophy engendered two blights. One affects their supporters, the other their opponents.

The blight that affects the opponents is the worse of the two, for some weak-minded individuals take the view that if such teachings are to be found in their books and incorporated into their falsehoods, then those teachings ought to be shunned, and moreover that anyone propagating such teachings ought to be condemned. Their first exposure to these teachings is through the philosophers, and so their weak minds judge them to be false simply because those who propagate them are proponents of falsehood in general.

Imagine that someone hears a Christian say, "There is no god but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God," and condemns this, crying, "This is the doctrine of the Christians!" He does not stop to ask himself what exactly it is that makes the Christian an unbeliever: is it that he believes this statement, or that he denies the Prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ? If it is only this denial that makes him an unbeliever, then he ought not to be opposed when he says something else that happens to be true, simply because he believes it to be true himself.

But that is the way of the weak-minded: they judge a thing to be true based on who says it, instead of judging a man to be truthful based on what he says. The intelligent person follows the example of the greatest intellectual of all, 'Alī ᑭ, who said, "Do not know the truth by men, but know the truth, and then you will know its people." The intelligent man knows the truth and then looks at the statement. If it is true, he accepts it no matter if the speaker is a truthful person or not. He might even take a keen

interest in gleaning truth from the statements of partisans of error, knowing that gold may be found in mud. An experienced money-changer is not harmed by putting his hand into a counterfeiter's purse and pulling out the real gold coin from among all the false ones, trusting in his keen sight. It is the simple villager, not the skilled money-changer, who needs to be warned not to deal with the counterfeiter. A strong swimmer need not be held back from the sea, nor a skilled snake-charmer cautioned against handling a snake. Such cautions are only necessary for children or those who have no training.

Yet the fact of the matter is that most people deem themselves experts of the highest skill and mental capacity when it comes to the task of differentiating between truth and falsehood, guidance and misguidance; and for this reason it is necessary to dissuade most people from reading the books of the proponents of falsehood, as far as is possible. Otherwise, even if they happen to be immune to the first blight, they will not be immune to the second, which we shall discuss presently.

Some of the statements in my own books regarding the mysteries of the religious sciences have been criticized by a certain faction who lack true mastery of the sciences and whose insight has not penetrated to the farthest reaches of the schools of thought. This faction claim that I borrowed those statements from the teachings of the ancients, when in fact some of them were products of my own independent thought—for it is inevitable that different minds will tread the same paths of reasoning—while others are from the religious written tradition, and most are to be found, in spirit if not in letter, in the writings of the mystics. Even if they were not, if a statement is logically sound and supported by evidence, and does not contradict the Qur'ān and Sunna, it should not be rejected or shunned. If we were to establish the principle that every notion that a follower of falsehood ever uttered must be condemned, we

would be forced to reject much that is true, including many verses of the Qur'ān, Traditions of the Prophet, accounts of the early Muslims, and statements of the sages and mystics, simply because whoever authored [the *Epistles of*] *The Brethren of Purity*ⁱ cited them in his work in order to entice the hearts of fools towards his nonsense. Such a principle would also allow the proponents of falsehood to wrest the truth from our hands simply by publishing it in their books.

The lowest degree of knowledge is to distinguish oneself from the totally naïve unlearned person, such that one would not be disgusted to see honey in a glass ordinarily used for cupping. An intelligent person understands that the glass does not change the essence of the honey in any way, and that the natural aversion for it is based on common ignorance arising from the notion that a cupping-glass is made to carry impure blood. The ignorant mind perceives a link between the glass, the blood, and the impurity. It does not realize that the blood is impure not simply because it is in the cupping-glass, but because of a quality inherent in it—a quality that is entirely absent in honey. Simply placing honey in a container usually used for blood will not instill that quality into it. Therefore, there is no reason to consider such honey impure, and it would be fanciful and wrong to do so.

Yet that is what most people do. When told that a person of whom they approve says something, they accept it even if it is false; and when told that a person of whom they disapprove says something, they reject it even if it is true. They always judge the truth by the man, never the man by the truth, though it is the height of misguidance to do so.

i The "Brethren of Purity" (*Ikhwān al-Safā*) were a secret group of Muslim philosophers whose teachings are represented in their *Rasā'il*, an eclectic collection of epistles composed in the 4th or 5th/10th or 11th century.

That, then, is the blight that afflicts those who reject the science of ethics. The second blight afflicts those who accept this science. What happens is that when they examine books such as *The Brethren of Purity* and see the teachings of Prophetic wisdom and mysticism incorporated therein, they are impressed with this and form a high opinion of them. In consequence, they eagerly accept the contents of the books wholesale, the false and the true parts alike, because of their high opinion of the true parts. In this way they are gradually led into falsehood.

It is because of this blight that it is necessary to discourage the reading of such books, owing to the deceptions and dangers they contain. Just as a man who cannot swim must be warned of the slippery banks of the river, people must be cautioned about reading such books. Just as a child must be kept from touching a snake, ears must be kept from hearing these confusing expressions. A snake-charmer is careful not to handle snakes in front of his young child, as he knows the child will imitate him and imagine that he can do just as his father does. Not only will he warn the child not to touch the snake; he will also refrain from doing it in front of him. The same duty is incumbent upon a well-grounded scholar. The snake-charmer knows how to handle the snake and differentiate between the venom and the antidote, and how to extract the antidote from it and neutralize the venom, and therefore he must not withhold the antidote from someone who needed it. The skilled and experienced money-changer knows how to put his hand into the counterfeiter's purse and sift through the fake coins to find the genuine ones, and therefore he must not withhold the genuine ones from anyone who needs them. The scholar must do likewise.

Conversely, if someone is in need of the antidote but shrinks from it in disgust because he knows that it was extracted from the very snake from which the venom came, or if a poor man in need of money is reluctant to accept the genuine coin because it was

taken from a counterfeiter's purse, they must be informed that their reluctance is born of simple ignorance, and that they must drop it or else be deprived of the benefit they seek. They must be taught that the genuine article does not become fake simply by being in close contact with the fake, just as the fake does not become genuine by that same contact. Likewise, close contact between truth and falsehood does not render truth false, nor falsehood true.

That is all we have to say here about the drawbacks and deceptions of philosophy.

The Path of "Infallible Teaching" (*Ta'lim*)ⁱ and its Deceptions

After finishing with the science of philosophy, having pursued and understood it and discovered what are its spurious elements, I realized that this too was not sufficient for my purposes, and that the intellect alone cannot comprehend all that it seeks or uncover the solution to every problem. The *Ta'lim* movement was well established by then, and it was common to encounter discussions regarding their claim that all things can be understood by reference to the infallible Imam who upholds truth. I therefore resolved to investigate their claims and study their writings; and coincidentally, I then received instructions from the Caliph himselfⁱⁱ to author a book revealing the truth about their school. I was unable to refuse, and this provided an external motive to match the one that had already arisen within me. I therefore began perusing their books

i *Ta'limiyya* was the name by which the Ismā'īlis came to be known in Imam Ghazālī's home region of Khurāsān. Ḥasan-i Sabbāḥ, their leader in Alamūt, their stronghold in northern Iran, reformulated Ismā'īlī teachings; he placed extra emphasis on the authority of the Imam and his teaching (*Ta'lim*). See M.G.S. Hodgson, "Chapter 5: The Ismā'īlī State" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 422–482, especially 472–482.

ii The Caliph was the Abbasid al-Mustazhir (r. 487–512/1094–1118), and the resultant work was *Fadā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya* (the Infamies of the False Esoterists); it is also known as *al-Mustazhiri*, after the patron who commissioned it.

and collecting their teachings. I also became aware of certain recent statements of theirs produced by contemporary members of their sect, which did not conform to the familiar methods of their predecessors. I collected all these and arranged them systematically in a manner conducive to thorough examination, and I produced an exhaustive response to them. One of the orthodox took exception to the lengths to which I had gone to present their arguments, and said, "You are doing their work for them! They could never have argued for their own dubious statements had you not organized and presented them so well."

That criticism is in fact justified from a certain perspective, for Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbalⁱ criticized al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī,ⁱⁱ may God have mercy on them both, for writing refutations of the Mu'tazila. Al-Ḥārith argued that rebutting heresy is an obligation, to which Aḥmad responded, "Yes, but you first set out their false position and then refuted it. How can you be sure that someone will not read the false position and become attached to it in his mind, and then either not bother to read the rebuttal, or else read the rebuttal but not understand it?"

What Aḥmad said was true, but it referred to a heresy that was not yet widespread and well-known. If a heresy has already become widespread, it becomes necessary to refute it, which one cannot do without first describing it. Of course, one should not suggest any elaborations upon their falsehood that they did not suggest themselves, and I was careful not to do so. In fact, I had heard such an elaboration from a friend of mine who had been in contact with them and become well-versed in their teachings. He

i Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal of Baghdad (d. 241/855) was the founder of one of the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence, and also the compiler of one of the six canonical Hadith collections.

ii An early mystic of Baghdad, al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) authored several important works on ethics and Sufism and was a major influence on Ghazālī.

told me that they would laugh at the works authored in refutation of their school, and say that their authors had not even understood their argument. He then told me what that argument was as they had described it. I did not want it to be said of me that I too had overlooked their fundamental argument, and therefore I related it. Nor did I wish it to be thought that I had heard it but not understood it, and therefore I elucidated it thoroughly. My purpose was to fully elucidate their false position in order then to properly demonstrate its falsehood.

The result was that their heresy was proven false beyond any possible rebuttal. In truth, it is so weak that it would never have gained any traction at all, were it not for the unfortunate help it received from well-meaning but ignorant men. Fanaticism led the defenders of truth into prolonged debates with them about the precepts of their position, and arguments over their every statement. Their opponents denied their claim that "there must be teaching, and there must be a teacher," as well as their claim that "it cannot be just any teacher, but only an infallible teacher." Yet their claim about the necessity of teaching and a teacher was obviously true and their opponents could not convincingly refute it, which led many to entertain the delusion that their teachings must be true, considering how weak their opposition was. They did not understand that this was because those who were arguing on the side of truth were unprepared and unaware of the proper approach to take. What they should have done is agree that a teacher is indeed necessary, and that teacher must indeed be infallible; but our infallible teacher is Muḥammad ﷺ. They would have responded, "But he is dead," to which our answer would be, "And your teacher is hidden."ⁱ They would say, "Our teacher taught his preachers and

i This does not seem to mean "occultation" in the sense understood in some branches of Shi'a Islam, given that later the author depicts them as suggesting it is possible to travel to meet with this "hidden Imam."

dispatched them throughout the lands, and he expects them to return to him should they disagree or encounter any difficulty." Our response would be, "Our teacher taught his preachers and dispatched them throughout the lands, but he completed his teaching: as God Most High says, *Today I have completed for you your religion* (Qur'ān 5:3). Once the teaching is perfected, there is no harm if the teacher should die or become hidden."

Their argument would remain, "How, then, will you rule on things on which you have not yet heard? Will you rule by the revealed text, even though it says nothing on the subject, or will you employ independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) or opinion, though this will inevitably result in disagreement?" Our answer would be, "We do what Mu'ādhⁱ did when the Messenger of God ﷺ sent him to Yemen: we rule by the revealed text when a relevant text exists, and by independent reasoning when it does not." That is exactly what their own preachers do when they are away from the Imam in far-flung lands. It is not possible to rule always by the text, since a finite text cannot cover infinite situations, nor can the preacher return to the Imam every time something unexpected comes up. He might go all that way and return, only to find the questioner dead and the opportunity to help him long gone. If a man cannot find the Qibla, he has no option but to engage in independent reasoning. If he were to travel all the way to the Imam to ask him, he would miss the prayer time. Therefore, it is permitted to pray in the direction of one's best guess as to where the Qibla is. The saying goes that the one who engages in independent reasoning and gets it wrong will be rewarded once, while the one who gets it right will be rewarded twice. The same goes for other issues pertaining to independent reasoning.

i Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, a beloved Companion of the Prophet ﷺ (d. 18/639).

Take for instance the question of giving zakat to the poor. One might deem a recipient to be poor based on one's independent reasoning, although secretly he is a rich man concealing his wealth. Such a person cannot be faulted for giving the charity to that man, even if in fact he was not a worthy recipient, for the giver is judged according to what he thought the situation was.

Our interlocutor might say, "But one man's supposition is no better than that of another who supposes the opposite." My answer would be, "He must follow his own supposition, just as one does when determining the Qibla, even if someone else disagrees."

He might say, "But what of the person who defers to the authority of a legal school? After 'all, he follows Abū Hanīfa, or al-Shāfi'i,ⁱ or whoever it may be." I would answer, "What should such a person do in a situation where the direction of the Qibla is uncertain, and the authorities of independent reasoning differ?" He would reply, "He must exert his own independent reasoning to determine which of them is most knowledgeable regarding the method of ascertaining the Qibla, and then follow that reasoning." But that is exactly how it is with the legal schools. It was therefore necessary for the Prophets and imams to instruct humankind to have recourse to independent reason, despite being aware that they would make mistakes. The Messenger of God ﷺ even said, "I rule according to outward appearances; the inner secrets are for God alone to judge."ⁱⁱ In other words, "I rule according to what witnesses' testimony suggests is most likely the truth, although it could be that they are mistaken." There is no way for even the Prophets themselves

i Abū Hanīfa (d. 150/767) and al-Shāfi'i (d. 204/820), along with Mālik (d. 179/795) and Ahmad (d. 241/855), are the founders of the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence.

ii Shāfi'i, *Musnad* 8, presented as an expression of the Prophet's ﷺ general attitude rather than as an actual saying of his.

to avoid all possibility of error in such exercises of judgment, so how could anyone else aspire to it?

At this juncture they might ask two questions. One is: "This may be true of matters of independent reasoning, but it is not true of matters of doctrine, for errors in those are not excusable. What, then, is to be done about them?" My reply would be: "The fundamental matters of doctrine are covered by the Qur'ān and Sunna. As for the additional details that are subject to dispute, the truth about them can be known by weighing them in the just balance, namely the standards that God outlines in His Book. There are five of these, as I discussed in my book *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* (The Just Balance)."

Our interlocutor might say, "But your rivals disagree with you regarding that standard." I would reply, "It is inconceivable that anyone could understand that standard and then disagree with it. The proponents of *Ta'lim* would not disagree, since I derived it from the Qur'ān and learned it from that source. The proponents of logic would not disagree either, since it meets their criteria of logic and does not contravene them. Nor would a theologian disagree, since it satisfies his requirements for proof based on discursive reasoning, which is how the truth of theological propositions is determined."

He might say, "If you have such a standard in your possession, why do you not use it to settle the disagreement once and for all, for all of mankind?" I would reply, "If they only listened to me, I would do just that. I have explained in *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* how to settle the disagreement. Study it and you will see that it is the truth, and that it would settle the disagreement altogether if people would only listen; but of course they will not. Yet some have listened to me, and I have settled the disagreement between them. Your Imam wishes to settle the disagreement between them all, though they do not listen. Why has it not been settled already?

Why did 'Alī ﷺ, the first of the Imams, not settle it himself? Or does your Imam claim that he can compel them all to listen by force? If so, why has he not done so? Has he postponed it for another day? Has his mission done anything for mankind other than exacerbate the conflict and add more contenders to it? There was certainly good reason to fear that this conflict would lead to harm—blood spilled, towns ruined, children orphaned, roads made unsafe, property plundered. Your blessed 'conflict resolution' has given rise throughout the world to conflict the like of which has never been seen."

He might say, "You claim to be able to settle the disagreement among mankind, yet a person who stands confused amid differing schools of thought and opposing views has no reason to listen to you rather than to your rival. You have more rivals than allies, and there is no difference between you and them." That is their [implied] second question.

I would reply, "First of all, this argument can be turned against you, for you also call this confused person to yourself, and he would be well within his rights to say, 'Why should I listen to you above all others, when most learned people oppose you?' Upon my word, how will you answer him? Will you tell him, 'My Imam is supported by the Scripture'? Why should anyone believe this claim to scriptural authority, when he has not heard it from the Messenger? All that he will hear is your claim, on the one hand, and the consensus of the learned that it is a false contrivance, on the other. Even if he does acknowledge your claim to scriptural authority, what if he is uncertain about the very validity of Prophethood itself? He will say to you, 'Suppose your Imam offers me proof in the form of the miracle of Jesus ﷺ, and says, 'The proof I am telling the truth is that I shall raise your father from the dead,' and then does it, and tells me that he is truthful. How can I know for sure that he is truthful? After all, that miracle was

not enough to make all of mankind believe in Jesus ﷺ. There are many difficult questions he might ask that can only be answered with carefully-considered rational arguments—but in your view, rational arguments are not to be trusted. Such a man has no cause to acknowledge the evidentiary value of miracles unless he knows of sorcery or the distinction between it and miracles, and unless he knows that God does not purposefully misguide His servants; and the question of God's misguidance is a notoriously difficult problem to answer. How, then will you answer all this? There is no good reason to follow your Imam over any of his rivals."

Thus the question must come back to rational arguments, which they reject and which their rivals can utilize far more lucidly than they can. Their objection is completely turned against them, striking a mighty blow that they could not answer even if every member of their sect from the first to the last made a joint effort to do so. The reason their heresy was able to grow was that the weak-minded people who opposed them tried to meet their arguments with arguments of their own, instead of turning their arguments back against them. This unduly lengthens the debate, and does not provide answers that quickly convince people's minds or silence an opponent.

Someone might ask, "You have demonstrated how their argument may be turned against them, but can you provide an actual answer to it?" Indeed I can: the answer is that if the confused person simply says, "I am confused," without specifying exactly what it is that confuses him, I would say, "You are like a sick person who simply says, 'I am sick' and asks for treatment without specifying exactly what is wrong. There is no such thing as a universal cure for all sickness; there are only cures for particular ailments: headache, diarrhea, and so on." Just so, the confused person must specify where his confusion lies. Once he does so, I will explain the truth to him by recourse to the aforementioned five standards,

which no one could understand without then acknowledging them to be the true balance by which all things should be weighed. He will understand the balance, and hence understand the validity of judgments made by it, just as the student of arithmetic understands arithmetic itself, and also understands that his teacher knows the subject and can be trusted regarding it." I have explained this in *The Just Balance*, in around twenty pages.

My purpose here is not to demonstrate the falsity of their movement, for I have already done so in *al-Mustazhiri*; then again in *Hujjat al-haqq* (The Demonstration of Truth), which was a reply to criticisms they made against me in Baghdad; then a third time in *Mufaṣṣil al-khilāf* (The Exposition of the Dispute) in twelve chapters, a rebuttal to criticisms made against me in Hamadān; then fourthly in *al-Darj* (The Register), a work presented as an itemized list of rebuttals of some feeble criticisms they made against me in Tūs; then fifthly in *al-Qistās al-mustaqim* (The Just Balance), an independent work intended to demonstrate the standard by which knowledge is measured, obviating the need for an infallible imam.ⁱ

Rather, my aim here is to show that this faction offer no lifeline whatsoever to the person drowning in the darkness of opinions. This is not only because they cannot demonstrate a way to prove the identity of the imam. We indulged them to great lengths, accepting that there is a need for teaching and for an infallible teacher, and even allowing that the one they designate is in fact this teacher. But when we asked them what exactly they learned from this infallible teacher, and presented them with some problematic questions, they could not even understand them, much less solve them. Faced with this impasse, they referred the matter to the "hidden Imam" and said that one must travel to him to consult him. How curious that

i *Al-Mustazhiri* is the work commissioned by the Caliph al-Mustazhir, as noted above. The second, third, and fourth works on this list are apparently lost.

they spent their lives searching for their Teacher and exulting in having found him, yet did not learn anything from him whatsoever! They are like a man covered in filth who goes on an arduous search for water, only to not bother using it when he finds it, and choosing to leave himself filthy.

One of them does claim to have possession of this knowledge of theirs, but all he can produce are bits and pieces of the feeble philosophy of Pythagoras, a man of the early ancients whose school of thought was the weakest of them all, thoroughly and savagely refuted by Aristotle. That is what forms the content of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, and it is truly the nadir of philosophy. How curious, then, that someone should devote his life to the arduous pursuit of knowledge only to let himself be convinced by such a feeble parody of it, imagining that he has attained the ultimate aims of all science!

We examined such people too, scrutinizing them inside and out, and concluded that their teachings amounted to no more than deceiving common folk and weak-minded individuals by asserting the need for a teacher and then goading them into debating this, then using powerful arguments to prove that it is indeed necessary. But when their interlocutor concedes this necessity and says, "Very well, tell us what this teacher says, and allow us to benefit from his teachings," they stop and say, "Now that you have conceded this point, it is for you to seek him out yourself. I only wanted to bring you that far." For he knows that if he were to say anything further, he would be exposed and proven incapable of answering even the simplest problem—incapable of even understanding it, much less of solving it!

That is the truth about this sect. Try them, and you will revile them! After we had tried them, we left them well alone.

The Sufis

After finishing with those sciences I directed my attention to the path of the Sufis. I learned that their path may only be followed properly by means of knowledge and action, and that their teachings boil down to surmounting the obstacles of the soul and shedding blameworthy traits and lowly attributes, until at last the heart is emptied of everything but God Most High, and adorned with remembrance of Him.

Knowledge came more naturally to me than action, and so I began by seeking their knowledge from books such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb* (Provisions for Hearts), al-Muḥāsibī's books, and the reported sayings of Junayd,ⁱ al-Shibli,ⁱⁱ Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī,^{iv} and other masters, may God sanctify their spirits. I came to an intellectual understanding of their teachings, and gained as much as can be gained from their path by study and hearsay alone. I realized, however, that the true kernel of their teaching is something that cannot be reached by study, but only by direct "tasting" (*dhawq*), experience, and moral transformation. There is a vast gulf between having knowledge of the definition of health and satiety—what causes them and what they require—and actually *being* healthy and sated. One may know the definition of intoxication, and how it is a state wherein vapors arise from the stomach and impair the mind; but what a different thing it is to actually be intoxicated! A drunken man does not even know the definition of drunkenness, for in his drunken state he is devoid of knowledge. Conversely, a sober man knows the definition of

i A Persian mystic (d. 386/996) whose compendious manual of Sufi teachings greatly influenced many Sufi writers, including our author.

ii The highly influential early Sufi master of Baghdad (d. 298/910).

iii A Baghdadi Sufi master who was a disciple of Junayd (d. 334/946).

iv An ecstatic and controversial, but much revered and quoted, Sufi from Bastām in Iran (d. 261/874).

intoxication and its constituents, yet he is not in the least intoxicated. When a physician is sick, he knows the definition of health and what is required to restore it, though he is himself bereft of health. Likewise, there is a difference between knowing the definition, requirements, and causes of asceticism, and actually being an ascetic whose soul is detached from the world.

I therefore realized for certain that the Sufis were people of true experience, not mere words, and that I had attained all that could be attained through study. Nothing remained for me except for that which cannot be gained through study and instruction, but only through direct experience and spiritual wayfaring. From the sciences I had studied and the paths I had walked down during the course of examining the branches of religious and rational sciences, I had attained certain faith in God Most High, Prophethood, and the Last Day. These three fundamentals of faith had become firmly rooted in my soul; not because of any specific rational argument, but thanks to various causes, contexts, and experiences that cannot be detailed in full. It had become clear to me that my only hope of salvation in the Hereafter was through God-consciousness and abstinence from base desire, the summit of which is to sever the heart's attachments to the world by shunning the Abode of Illusion, turning to the Abode of Eternal Life, and concentrating my aspiration entirely on God Most High. The only way to achieve this was to forsake wealth and renown, and to flee from attachments and distractions.

I looked around me and found myself completely submerged in attachments, which surrounded me on all sides. I considered my activities, the best of which were teaching and instruction, and saw that I was overly concerned with unimportant sciences that would bring no benefit in the Hereafter. Next I contemplated my intentions in teaching, and I realized that they were unsound and not truly devoted to God Most High but rather motivated by the

pursuit of reputation and renown. I saw myself upon the brink of a crumbling precipice, and knew that if I did not change my ways, I would tumble into Hell.

I continued to contemplate this for a time, and all the while the choice lay there before me. One day I would resolve to leave Baghdad and bid farewell to that life, but then the next day I would abandon the idea. I would take one step forward, another back. If in the morning a genuine desire to seek the Hereafter stirred in me, by the evening a host of base desires would have arisen to beat it back. Worldly ambitions strove to chain me down where I was, while the herald of faith cried out, "Set out, set out! You have not long left to live, and a long journey lies ahead of you. All your knowledge and action is but ostentation and illusion! If you will not prepare for the Hereafter now, then when? If you will not sever these attachments now, then when?" With this, the message would hit home and I would resolve to flee.

But then Satan would return and say, "This is nothing but a passing phase. Do not give in to it, for it will be gone before long. If you give up all this renown, this comfortable life free from woes and disturbances, this dignified secure position safe from rival threats, you will live to regret it, and it will not be easy to recover."

I continued to be pulled back and forth by the attractions of worldly desire and the impulses of the Hereafter for almost six months, beginning in Rajab 488 (July-August 1095 CE). In that month, it became a matter not of choice but of compulsion, for God held my tongue and I found myself unable to teach. I would struggle to force myself to lecture for a single day, if only to please the hearts of those who came to hear instruction from me, but I could not utter a single word no matter how hard I tried. This produced great sorrow in my heart, and I could not digest my food, or even bring myself to take in a morsel. This made me weak, and the physicians gave up hope of curing me, diagnosing

my condition as a malady of the heart which had spread to the temperament, with no possible cure other than the expulsion of whatever anxiety had gripped my spirit.

Feeling utterly powerless and bereft of free will, I turned to God Most High as a man utterly without options; and He answered me, for He *answers the desperate one when he calls to Him* (Qur'ān 27:62). He made it easy for my heart to turn away from renown, wealth, family, children, and friends. I let it be known that I was headed for Mecca while privately planning to travel to Syria, fearing that the Caliph and all my friends would try to prevent me from relocating there. I concocted various schemes for leaving Baghdad quietly, intending never to return. However, my leaving became the talk of all the religious leaders of Iraq, for none of them could conceive of leaving a position such as mine for religious reasons, since to them it was the highest rank in all of religion. Such was *the full extent of their knowledge* (Qur'ān 53:30).

People began to come up with all kinds of ideas. Those far from Iraq supposed that I was fleeing after incurring the ire of some powerful person or other, while those who were closer to the government and had seen how eager they were to keep hold of me, while I seemed to pay them no heed and wish to be away from them, decided that it must be a supernatural affair: perhaps the evil eye had fallen upon the Muslims and scholarly classes.

So I left Baghdad, giving away what wealth I had, except for enough to sustain myself and provide for my children. This I could manage, for the wealth of Iraq is channeled into public works and treated as a trust for the Muslims. In all the world I have never seen better financial assistance allotted to scholars for their dependents.

I arrived in Syria and spent almost two years engaged in nothing but isolation and solitude, spiritual discipline and exertion. I worked on purifying my soul, refining my character, and cleansing my heart for the invocation of God Most High, as I had learned

from the books of the Sufis. I kept a retreat for a time in the [Great] Mosque of Damascus, going up the minaret and spending all day shut inside alone.

I then traveled to Jerusalem, where every day I would visit [the Dome of] the Rock and shut myself inside. Then I felt the impulse to carry out the obligatory pilgrimage and to draw upon the blessings of Mecca and Medina, and to visit the Messenger of God ﷺ after having visited Abraham the Friend of God ؑ, so I traveled to the Hejaz.

I then found myself pulled home by various pressing matters, not least the pleas of my children, and so I returned there, though there had been a moment when this seemed the unlikeliest course I would ever pursue. Still, even at home I preferred to keep myself isolated, longing for solitude and the purification of the heart for remembrance. The twists and turns of fortune, the concerns of my family, and the necessities of life diverted me from my purpose and spoiled the purity of my isolation. Only during a few scattered moments did I find true peace. Yet I did not give up my ambition, and returned to it each time circumstances drove me away.

I continued in that way for ten years, and in my moments of solitude during that time I was shown things that cannot be described or enumerated. I will say this much, however, as it may be of benefit. I learned for certain that the Sufis are the ones who travel the path of God, and that their method is the best method, their way the soundest way, their character the purest character. If all the intellectuals, sages, and scholars were to pool together their intellects, their wisdom, and their knowledge of the secrets of Revelation in an attempt to make some improvement to the Sufi method and character, or to replace them with something better, they would find no way of doing so. For the Sufi way—its every movement and stillness, its entire outer and inner being—is kindled

from the light of the niche of Prophethood; and there is no other light upon earth besides that light which can provide illumination.

How can one summarize the Sufi path? In Islam, the first requirement of the canonical prayer is ritual purity, and the prayer itself begins with the *takbīr* formula,ⁱ which is its initiatory key. In the Sufi path, the ritual purity is the total purification of the heart from all besides God Most High, and the initiatory key is the complete immersion of the heart in the remembrance of God. The end of the path is total annihilation (*fanā'*) in God; yet in truth that is only the end in relation to the preliminary steps that are within the sphere of free will and choice. In reality, annihilation is but the beginning of the path, and all that precedes it is no more than the antechamber.

From the beginning of the path, the mystical witnessing (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*mukāshafa*) begin. [Seekers] behold the angels and the spirits of the Prophets in the waking world, and they hear their voices and receive instruction from them. Their state then ascends from visions of forms and images through stages that cannot be described in words; anyone who tried to express them using language would find it impossible to avoid patent errors.

In sum, the ultimate end is a certain proximity to the divine that some might conceive of as "indwelling" (*bulūl*), others as "unification" (*ittiḥād*), and others again as "connection" (*wuṣūl*). Yet all of these conceptions are mistaken, as I have explained in my book *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* (The Loftiest Aim).ⁱⁱ Anyone who experiences this state should do no more than say, as the poet did:

What has been, has been; I shall not recount it.

i Saying *Allāhu akbar* (God is Greatest) while lowering the raised hands, which begins the ritual prayer.

ii A commentary on the divine Names.

Think the best, and do not ask about it!ⁱ

In sum, one who has not experienced it by firsthand "tasting" cannot know anything of the true nature of Prophethood, but only the name. The miracles of the saints are in fact the beginnings of the Prophets; and that was how it first began for the Messenger of God ﷺ, who would visit the Cave of Hira' and engage in solitary worship of his Lord inside, so that the Arabs began to say, "Muhammad is in love with his Lord!" True realization of this spiritual state can be attained only by one who follows its path until he directly tastes it. If a person is not granted the grace to taste, he may be able to achieve certainty of it through secondhand experience and hearsay if he spends much time in the company of the masters until eventually this environment allows him to understand it with certainty. Anyone who keeps their company will receive this faith from them; for "he who sits with such people will never be disappointed."ⁱⁱ Anyone who is not graced with the opportunity to keep their company should at least recognize that this is possible by rational argument, as I discussed in the "Book of the Marvels of the Heart" in *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences).

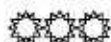
Certainty of a truth reached by rational argument is "knowledge." Direct experience of that truth is "taste." Receiving that truth through trust in secondhand experience and hearsay is "faith." These are three ranks: *God will raise the ranks of those of you who have faith, and those who have been given knowledge* (Qur'ān 58:11).

i From a poem by Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/908).

ii The reference is to a Hadith (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2689) according to which those who sit with people engaged in the remembrance of God (*Dhikr Allāh*) will gain salvation even if they were not participating with pure intentions.

Yet aside from the Sufis there are certain ignorant people who reject all of this outright and consider it fantastical. They listen with incredulity when it is described, and they say mockingly, "How amazing! What nonsense they talk!" God Most High says of such people, *Some of them listen to you, but when they leave you they say to those who have been given knowledge, 'What did he say just now?' Such are those whose hearts God has sealed, and who follow their base desires* (Qur'ān 47:16). Thus He makes them deaf, and blinds their sight.

Through my practice of the Sufi path, one of the things that became inescapably clear to me was the true nature and special properties of Prophethood. It is therefore necessary to provide a basic elementary account of this here, owing to its great importance.





CHAPTER 3

THE TRUE NATURE OF PROPHETHOOD, AND ALL HUMANKIND'S NEED FOR IT

In his most basic substance and original disposition, man was created simple and naïve, possessing no information about the realms of God Most High. There are many realms—so many that only God knows their number; as He says, *None knows the hosts of your Lord but He* (Qur'ān 74:31). Man's information about the realms is attained by means of perception, and every perception was created in order to inform man about a given realm of existence. By "realms" I mean "classes of existent beings."

The first sense created in man is that of touch, by which he may perceive certain qualities in existent things such as heat and cold, moisture and dryness, softness and roughness, and so on. Touch cannot apprehend colors or sounds at all, which might as well not exist at all so far as touch is concerned.

Next the sense of sight is created in him, and he is able to perceive colors and shapes, this being the broadest aspect of the realm of the senses. Then he is endowed with hearing, and he is able to hear sounds and pitch. Then the sense of taste is created in him, and so on until he completes his journey through the realm of senses.

When he nears the age of seven, the power of discernment is created in him, marking another stage of his development. With it he is able to perceive things that lie outside the realm of senses and do not exist in it at all. He then ascends to another stage, and intelligence is created in him, giving him the ability to perceive necessities, possibilities, impossibilities, and other things that are not to be found in the previous stages.

Beyond intelligence, there is another stage wherein another eye is opened; an eye that perceives the Unseen, future events, and other things to which the intellect is blind, just as the power of discernment is blind to the objects of intelligence, and just as the power of sense is blind to the objects of discernment. If the objects of intelligence were presented to a child in the stage of discernment, the child would reject and dismiss them; and in the same way, some intelligent people reject and dismiss the perceptions of Prophethood. That is sheer ignorance, for they have no basis for doing so. It is simply a stage they have not reached, so that to them it might as well not exist, and so they conclude that in fact it does not exist at all. If a blind man did not know by sheer quantity of hearsay that colors and shapes existed, and then the concept were suggested to him out of nowhere, he would not understand it or have any way of approaching it.

God Most High has provided His creatures with a way of approaching the concept of Prophethood by giving them something analogous to it, namely dreams. In dreams one may perceive something of the unseen future, whether directly or in the guise of a symbol that can be interpreted. Imagine that a person had never experienced this, and then someone told him that there are people who fall unconscious as though dead and lose touch with their senses, and then perceive the Unseen. He would reject this and argue for its impossibility, saying, "Perception occurs by means of the senses. If a person cannot perceive things when those senses

are present and active, how could he possibly perceive them when they are inactive?" This is a form of analogy that is disproven by lived experience.

So just as intelligence is one of the stages of human development, wherein man is endowed with an eye that perceives different kinds of intelligible things of which the senses are unaware, Prophethood too is another stage with its own eye, an eye endowed with light allowing it to perceive the Unseen and other things that intelligence cannot apprehend.

People doubt Prophethood in three ways. Some doubt that it is possible at all; others allow that it is possible, but doubt that it has actually occurred; others still doubt that it has been granted to a given individual.

The proof that Prophethood is possible, and that it has actually occurred, is that there exist in the world certain objects of knowledge that could not conceivably be acquired by means of reason alone, such as medicine and astronomy. When looking into them, one inevitably realizes that they could not have been apprehended without divine inspiration and grace from God Most High. Experiment alone would not be sufficient, for there are astronomical phenomena that occur only once every thousand years; how could they be arrived at by experiment? The same is true of the properties of medicines. This proves that it must be possible for there to be a way to perceive these things that the intelligence cannot perceive. That is what is meant by Prophethood. This is not to say that Prophethood is this and this alone, but rather that the perception of such things that lie outside the purview of intelligence is one of the special properties of Prophethood. It has many other special properties besides this, which is but a drop in its ocean. The reason I mention it here is that you yourself have something analogous to it, namely the things you perceive in dreams, and you also possess knowledge of its kind, such as medicine and

astronomy. These are the miracles of the Prophets, may peace and blessings be upon them all, and there is no way to attain them by recourse to intelligence alone.

The other special properties of Prophethood may only be perceived by experiential taste, by traveling the Sufi path. You only understand this much because you have something analogous to it, namely dreaming, and but for that you would not believe in it at all. If it were reserved for the Prophets alone and you had no analogy for it to allow you to understand it, how could you believe in it? Belief can only come after understanding. This analogy is attained with the first steps of the Sufi path, through the achievement of a certain kind of experiential tasting which is commensurate with what one attains, along with a certain kind of belief in what one does not manage to attain, based on analogy. This special property alone is therefore sufficient basis for faith in Prophethood.

Beyond that, if you should doubt the Prophetic status of a given individual, there is no way to arrive at certainty without gaining knowledge of that person's character, whether by firsthand observation or by sheer volume of hearsay. If you are familiar with medicine or jurisprudence, you are able to become familiar with jurists and physicians by studying their characters and hearing their words, even if you do not actually meet them in person. You are not incapable of recognizing that al-Shāfi'ī was a jurist and that Galen was a physician; and your recognition is factual, not mere conformity to the opinion of another. By simply learning something of jurisprudence and medicine and then reading books and works about them, you will arrive at necessary knowledge of their character.

Likewise, if you understand the meaning of Prophethood and then assiduously study the Qur'ān and Traditions, you will acquire the necessary knowledge that the Prophet ﷺ stands at the very summit of Prophethood. You may then bolster this by testing the

things he said about worship and how it assists in the purification of the heart, and how he ﷺ spoke the truth when he said, "When someone acts upon what he knows, God bequeaths him knowledge of what he knows not;"ⁱ or when he said, "When someone assists a tyrant God unleashes the tyrant against him;"ⁱ or when he said, "When someone rises in the morning with but one single concern, God Most High will see to all his concerns in this life and the next" (Ibn Mājah 257). When you experience the truth of this thousands of times over, you will arrive at necessary knowledge that brooks no doubt.

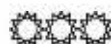
That is the way to attain certainty about Prophethood, not by such miracles as the transformation of a staff into a serpent, or the cleaving of the moon. If you were to witness those feats in a void without all the countless other things that provide them with context, you might take them to be sorcery or illusion, or think God wrought them to send you astray. After all, *God leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will* (Qur'ān 35:8). Thus, the question of miracles will be thrown back at you. If your faith is founded upon a rational argument from miracles, it will be destroyed by a counterargument demonstrating the problematic evidentiary value of miracles. Supernatural feats ought to be but one among many [types of] proofs and contexts that together form a holistic position, so that you attain necessary knowledge for which you cannot name only a single specific basis. It is akin to how when a man receives information from a large group of people, he cannot say that his certainty regarding the information is derived from any one specific member of that group. The source of his certainty is unknown to him, for it does not come from

i 'Irāqī notes in his study of the *Iḥyā'* that he could not find a source for this hadith, although there are others that express the same sentiment in different words.

outside that group, nor from any specific member of it. This is the nature of strong knowledge-based faith.

Experiential tasting, on the other hand, is like witnessing something in person and holding it in one's hand. It is found only in the Sufi path.

That is as much as I need say now regarding the true nature of Prophethood. I shall now explain why it was necessary to speak of it at all.





CHAPTER 4

THE REASON I RETURNED TO TEACHING

I persevered with isolation and solitude for almost ten years, during which time I came to acknowledge certain necessary truths. Those realizations came to me in countless ways: sometimes by experiential tasting, sometimes by demonstrative knowledge, and sometimes by acceptance through faith. I realized that man is created of body and heart; by "heart" I mean the true nature of his spirit, which is the seat of knowledge of God, not the flesh and blood that even corpses and beasts possess. I realized that just as the body can be healthy or sick, wherein lies its prosperity or ruin, the heart too can be healthy and sound; and *only he who comes to God with a sound heart* (Qur'ān 26:89) will have salvation. And the heart can be sick too, wherein lies its eternal everlasting ruin; as God says, *In their hearts is a sickness* (Qur'ān 2:10).

I realized that ignorance of God is a deadly poison, and that disobedience to God through pursuit of base desire is the heart's fatal disease, while knowledge of God Most High is the lifesaving antidote, and obedience to Him by resisting base desire is the healing remedy. I saw that the only way to minister to the heart, curing its sickness and restoring its health, is to use certain medicines, just as is true of the body. Medicines for the body restore its health

because of special properties in them which cannot be ascertained by intelligence alone but only by deferring to the physicians, who learned them from the Prophets, who thanks to the special property of Prophethood were able to perceive the properties of things. Just so, I realized with certainty that the medicines of worship, as fixed and prescribed by the Prophets, have effects that cannot be ascertained by intellectual effort alone; rather, one must conform to the directions of the Prophets, who knew those properties by the light of Prophethood, not by intellectual effort.

It is also true that medicines are composed of various mixtures of type and quantity, some being, for instance, twice the measure of others. The different quantities involved in them must arise from a mystery that is of the same nature as that of their special properties. The same is true of acts of worship, which are the medicines for the diseases of the heart: they are composed of actions of differing type and quantity, so that there are two prostrations for every one bow, and the dawn prayer is half the length of the afternoon prayer; and there must be a similar mystery to this of the same nature as their special properties, which can only be perceived by the light of Prophethood. Only a fool or a complete ignoramus would attempt to deduce the wisdom behind all this by recourse to reason, or dismiss them as arbitrary, rather than acknowledge that there must be a divine mystery to them that determines them based on their special properties.

It is also true that medicines have their bases, which are the fundamental ingredients, and also auxiliary ingredients which complement them, each having its own particular effect upon the function of the bases. The same is true of voluntary acts of worship, which complement and complete the effects of the essential acts of worship.

In sum, the Prophets ﷺ are the physicians of the heart. The purpose of intelligence and its activity is to allow us to recognize

this fact, and to bear witness that Prophethood is true and that the mind is unable to see through the eye of Prophethood. Intelligence takes us by the hand and entrusts us to the care of Prophethood, as the blind are entrusted to their guides and anxious patients are entrusted to sympathetic doctors. This is as far as the intelligence may go, and it plays no part in what lies beyond, other than in understanding the instructions it receives from the doctor.

These are some of the things I realized inescapably when they appeared to me as clear as daylight during my period of isolation and solitude. I then perceived a widespread indifference to doctrines concerned with the foundation and true nature of Prophethood, and acting according to its directives. I contemplated the causes for this general laxness and weakening of faith, and discovered that there were four. One applied to those who engaged in philosophy, another to those who engaged in Sufism, another to those who subscribed to the doctrine of *Ta'lim*, and another to the activities of those who are widely considered to be people of knowledge.

For a time I focused my attention on individual people. I would find someone who was lax about following the Law, and question him about his innermost doubts and beliefs. I would say, "Why are you lax about it? Is it not silly to believe in the Last Day but make no preparations for it, and instead trade it for the worldly life? You would not trade two for one, so why would you trade eternal life for a few short-lived days? And if you do not believe in it at all, then you are an unbeliever. You ought to search for faith and determine the cause of the unbelief you harbor within you, which is what makes you so bold in your outward conduct, even if you do not speak it aloud out of deference to faith and respect for the law."

One such man might reply, "If it were necessary to observe the Law like this, the religious clerics would be the first ones to do it—and yet I can name one well-known scholar who does not pray,

another who drinks, another who embezzles religious endowments and the property of orphans, another who accepts money from the ruler and does not guard against accepting anything unlawful, and another who takes bribes for rulings and testimonies!" And he might well go on to give further examples.

A second man might lay claim to Sufi knowledge and assert that he has reached such a level that he no longer needs to engage in formal worship. A third man might advance the arguments of the antinomiansⁱ to justify his actions. Such people have strayed from the true Sufi way.

A fourth man, who has had encounters with the proponents of *Ta'lim*, might say, "The truth is difficult and the path to it is impassable, and there is much dispute about it. No one school of thought has any better claim than any other. Rational arguments are contradictory, and no opinion can be trusted. Nor does the proponent of *Ta'lim* offer any proof. How can I set aside certainty for doubt?"

A fifth man might say, "My behavior is not governed by blind conformity. I have studied philosophy and discovered the true meaning of Prophethood: it all boils down to wisdom and welfare, and the purpose of the worship it enjoins is to regulate the common people and keep them from fighting, arguing, and wallowing in base indulgence. Yet I am not an ignorant common man, and such rules need not apply to me. I am one of the wise; I follow wisdom, and see with its clarity. I have no need to conform to authority."

That is the ultimate end of the faith of those who study the philosophy of the metaphysicians from the works of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. Such people show deference to Islam; you might see one of them recite the Qur'ān, attend congregational

i The *ahl al-ibāha*, "people of permissiveness," meaning those who justify disregard for religious law on the grounds that salvation is through faith alone.

prayer, and pay lip service to the Sacred Law, though he does not desist from drinking wine and other such immoral habits. One might ask him, "If Prophethood is not genuine, why do you pray?" He might reply, "To exercise my body, and to follow local custom, and for the sake of my possessions and family." Or perhaps he might reply, "The sacred Law is genuine, and Prophethood is real." One might ask, "Then why do you drink wine?" He might reply, "Wine is forbidden only because it stirs up enmity and hatred, but my wisdom protects me from that. I drink to broaden my mental horizons." Even Ibn Sinā himself wrote in a testament of his that he had made certain vows to God, including that he would venerate the injunctions of the Law and never be remiss in religious observances, and that he would not drink for pleasure, but only for medicine. The culmination of his purity of faith and religious praxis was that he allowed himself wine, "but only as medicine"!

Such is the faith of those of them who claim to have faith. Many have been deceived by them, and their opponents have only exacerbated this deception, since they countered them with nothing better than outright denials of the sciences of geometry, logic, and other patent facts on which they base their arguments, as we showed earlier.

I saw, then, the extent to which these causes had weakened the faith of all kinds of people. I also found that I had devoted myself so assiduously to solving this problem that dissecting the positions of these people—the Sufis, philosophers, Bāṭinis, and clerics—was as easy for me as drinking water, so deeply had I delved into their branches of knowledge and their ways. I therefore realized that to do so was my vocation and my duty, here and now. What use was it to remain in isolation and seclusion, when the disease had become so rampant that even the doctors were sick and mankind was on the brink of destruction? Yet at the same time I said to myself, "What can you possibly do to cure this malady and confront

this darkness? You live in an age of malaise and falsehood. If you commit yourself to calling humankind away from their paths and toward the truth, all the people of the age will oppose you. How could you hope to stand up to them? How could you even live among them? Such could only be achieved in an opportune era, and with the aid of a pious and powerful ruler."

I therefore permitted myself to remain in isolation, excusing myself before God Most High on the grounds that I was powerless to argue the truth's case in public. Yet God decided to rouse the resolve of the rulerⁱ personally, rather than by external means, and so he gave me strict orders to go to Nishapur to tackle this spiritual malaise. His orders were so strict that had I demurred, I would have ended up being banished altogether. I realized that my excuse no longer held weight; I could not allow my isolation to be motivated by laziness and desire for ease, or self-preservation in the face of potential harm from other people. It could not be that I had allowed myself that permission merely to avoid the difficulty of dealing with people! God Most High says, *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. Alif Lām Mim. Do people suppose they will be left to say, 'We believe', and will not be tested? We certainly tested those who were before them. Surely God will know those who are truthful, and surely He will know the liars* (Qur'ān 29:1-3). And He told His Messenger, the dearest of His creation to Him: *Messengers have indeed been denied before you, yet they steadfastly endured the denial and the persecution until Our help came to them. There is no changing the Words of God; and there has already come to you tidings of the Messengers* (Qur'ān 6:34). He says also: *In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. Yā Sin. By the Wise Qur'ān, truly*

i This was Fakhr al-Mulk (d. 500/1106), vizier to the Saljūq Sultan Aḥmad Sanjar (d. 552/1157).

you are one of the Messengers, upon a straight path. A revelation from the Almighty, the Most Merciful, so that you may warn a people whose forefathers were not warned, so they are oblivious. Already has the Word proved true of most of them, for they will not believe. We have put shackles around their necks reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up. And We have set before them a barrier and behind them a barrier, and thus veiled them so they do not see. It is the same to them whether you warn them or warn them not; they will not believe. You can warn only him who follows the Remembrance and fears the All-Merciful unseen (Qur'ān 36:1-11).

I consulted several masters of the science of the heart and mystical witnessing about this, all of whom advised me to come out of isolation and leave the Sufi lodge (*zāwiya*). In addition, many righteous people told me of dreams they had had indicating that this move would be a source of goodness and guidance, and that God Almighty had decreed it for the beginning of the century. There was good reason to hope and to think well of these omens, for God Almighty has promised to revive His religion at the beginning of each century.¹

God thus facilitated my move to Nishapur to embark upon this mission in Dhūl-Qa'da 499 (July 1106). I had left Baghdad in 488 (1095), and so my time in isolation had lasted eleven years. It was God Most High who aroused this impulse—which was one of His marvelous decrees of fate, for it had never once occurred to my heart in all that time. Nor had departure from Baghdad and retirement from my life there ever seemed even a remote possibility to me before the impulse suddenly arose. Yet God is always

¹ Reference to the hadith, "God will send this Community, at the beginning of each century, someone to revive their religion for them." Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* 4291.

turning hearts and spirits this way and that: "The believer's heart is between two fingers of the All-Merciful" (Muslim 2654).

Yet I know that although I have returned to the dissemination of knowledge, in truth I have not returned at all, for "to return" means to go back to how things were. In those days I disseminated the kind of knowledge by which renown is sought, and called people to it with my words and my deeds, and that was my intention and motivation. Now, however, I call them to the kind of knowledge by which renown is given up, because it exposes its worthlessness. That is now my intention, my motivation, and my ambition. God knows that this is true. My desire is to reform myself and others. I do not know if I shall achieve it or not, but I believe with faith and conviction that there is no power or strength save with God, the Sublime, the Magnificent. I believe that it is not I who move, but He who moves me; not I who act, but He who uses me. I ask Him to reform me first, then reform others through me; to guide me, then guide through me; to show me truth as truth, and grant that I follow it; and to show me falsehood as falsehood, and grant that I avoid it.ⁱ



Let us return to our discussion of the causes of the weakening of faith, and consider how people may be guided and saved from the brink of ruin.

For those who are perplexed because of the teachings of the *Ta'lim* movement, the cure is described in my book *The Just Balance*, so we need not dwell on it here.

i The supplication "O God, show me the truth as truth, and grant that I follow it; and show me the false as false, and grant that I avoid it" is attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ.

For the delusions of the antinomians, I summarized and rebutted them in seven categories in *Kimiyā' al-sa'āda* (The Alchemy of Happiness).ⁱ

For those whose faith has been so corrupted by philosophy that they deny Prophethood itself, we have discussed here the true meaning of Prophethood and how it must necessarily exist, as is proven by the existence of the sciences of pharmacology, astronomy, and others. We broached the topic specifically for that reason, and referred to medicine and astronomy because they are among the sciences of the philosophers. Yet to any expert in a given art and science, whether astronomy, medicine, nature, sorcery, amulet-making, or some other, we could offer examples demonstrating the truth of Prophethood.

Then there are those who profess to believe in Prophethood but equate the teachings of revelation with wisdom or common sense. In reality they do not believe in Prophethood at all, but only in an idea that people follow because of a certain allure that it possesses. This has nothing to do with Prophethood, for true faith in Prophethood means to affirm the existence of a level of perception beyond the intellect, whereby an eye becomes open to objects that pertain to that level alone while the intellect is totally excluded, just as the sense of hearing is excluded from the perception of color, and sight from the perception of sound, and all physical senses from the perception of intelligibles. If [a person in the above category] does not accept this, we have provided proof of its possibility, and indeed of its necessity. If he does accept it, then he accepts that there are things called special properties in which the intellect plays no part, and which the intellect might almost deny and call impossible.

i This refers to the longer Persian text rather than the Arabic abridgement; the same ground is covered in the *Ihyā'* in the Book of Delusions.

For example, a *dāniq* weightⁱ of opium is enough poison to kill, since its excessive cold freezes the blood in the veins. The naturalist scientist will claim that when a compound substance becomes cold, it does so due to the elements of water and earth, which are the cold elements. Yet it is obvious that many pounds of water and earth would not make the interior of the body as cold as opium does. If the naturalist were told of this property of opium without testing it for himself, he would say, "That is impossible! Why? Because opium contains the elements of fire and air, which do not increase cold. Even if it were entirely composed of water and earth, it would not produce such a cooling effect, to say nothing of it containing two hot elements as well." He would consider this a convincing argument. Most of the arguments of the philosophers, whether physical or metaphysical, are of that order. Their conceptions of things are based on the limits of their observation and reasoning, and they dismiss anything unfamiliar to them as impossible.

Another example: if true dreams were not a familiar phenomenon, and someone claimed that he attained knowledge of the unseen when insensate, those who have such minds would reject his claim. Or consider if you were to tell someone who has never seen fire that there is a substance in the world the size of a grain which could consume an entire town if placed in it, and then consume itself too, leaving nothing behind. He would dismiss this as an impossibility, a mere fable—yet that is just what fire does. Most of the denials of the marvels of the Hereafter are of this sort.

Therefore we say to the naturalist, "You have been compelled to admit that there is a cooling property in opium that does not conform to nature as it is rationally perceived. Why, then, do you not admit the possibility that the teachings of revelation might

i Around half a gram.

have similar special properties as regards healing and purification of the heart, which cannot be grasped by rational wisdom and can only be seen with the eye of Prophethood?" For in fact they do acknowledge special properties that are more wondrous still, as their writings show. These include the marvelous properties, confirmed by observation, regarding the treatment of a woman experiencing a difficult childbirth, by use of the following table:

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

This is written upon two pieces of fabric untouched by water, and the woman in labor is then instructed to look at them directly and then place them beneath her feet, and the child is delivered soon after. They admit that this is possible, and they include it in their collections of special properties.ⁱ It is a table containing nine cells, each containing a particular number, such that the total of any row, column, or diagonal is fifteen.

I cannot fathom how a person could believe in this and yet not possess a broad enough mind to believe that the specific number of cycles in the ritual prayers—two cycles for the dawn prayer, four for the midday, three for the sunset—is so fixed because of certain properties that conventional wisdom cannot grasp, ultimately due

i This could also be understood as "they include it in *The Marvels of Occult Properties* (*'Ajā'ib al-khawāṣṣ*)," if the title of a book, or a genre of such works, is meant.

to the difference between these times of day, but perceptible only by the light of Prophethood. What is interesting is that if we were to change our mode of expression and employ the language of the astrologers, they would comprehend the difference between these times of day. We might say, "Does it not make a difference to the horoscope whether the sun is at the zenith, or ascending, or declining?" For they base their horoscopes on such movements, and use them to make declamations about treatments, life-spans, and fates. But what is the difference between our conception of midday [as a prayer time] and their zenith [as an astrological condition], or our sunset and their declension? Is there any reason for them to believe that version, other than that they hear it in the language of the astrologers? A man might hear a hundred lies from an astrologer and go on believing in him. He might tell him, "When the sun is in its zenith and such-and-such star faces it during such-and-such constellation, if you put on new clothes, you will be killed in them!" So when that time comes, he refuses to put on the clothes even if it is terribly cold, and even though he knows full well that the astrologer has told him many lies before.

How on earth can someone have a broad enough mind to believe such wonders, and thereby be obliged to accept that they are special properties whose knowledge must have been acquired miraculously by a Prophet, yet still deny claims of the very same nature when he hears them conveyed from a truthful Prophet who was assisted by miracles and was never known to have told a lie? Why can he not allow for this possibility?

If a philosopher denies the possibility of these properties in the number of cycles of ritual prayer, the stoning of the *Jamarāt* Pillars during the pilgrimage, the number of pilgrimage rites, and other such ritual matters ordained by revelation, he will not find there to be any difference in principle between them and the properties of medicines or celestial bodies. He might say, "I have experienced

enough of astrology and medicine to conclude that some of it is true, and so I feel able to trust them in general, and my heart no longer doubts them. But I have no experience of Prophethood. How can I know for certain that it exists or learn the true meaning of it, even if I do admit the possibility?"

My answer would be, "Your trust is not limited to your experience alone. On the contrary, you hear statements from others about their experiences, and you accept them. You ought to listen to what the Prophets said, for they experienced and witnessed the truth of all that revelation conveyed to them. Follow their way, and you will witness some of it for yourself. Yet in any case, I say that even if you had no experience, your intellect would still compel you to trust and follow. Imagine that a man reaches adulthood and the fullness of intelligence without ever experiencing illness, and then falls ill; and imagine that his father is a compassionate and skilled doctor, and that the son has always known of his father's expertise in that field. The father concocts a remedy for him and says, 'This will heal you and end your sickness.' What will the son's intellect compel him to do, even if the medicine is bitter and foul-tasting? Will he take it? Or will he refuse it, saying, 'I do not understand why this medicine should cure my illness. I have never experienced it.' If he did the latter, you would doubtless take him for a fool. Just so, the people of inner vision take you for a fool because of your reticence."

He might say, "How can I know that the Prophet ﷺ was a compassionate and learned practitioner of this medicine?"

I would answer, "How did you know that your father was a compassionate man? After all, that is not something that the senses can perceive. You knew it through the context of his life, and by witnessing his actions from the sources and channels available to you, which provided you with certain and indubitable knowledge. By examining the words of God's Messenger ﷺ, the narrations

about his concern for the guidance of humanity, and the adept way in which he employed kindness and compassion to lead people to improve their characters and reconcile with one another—in sum, to rectify their religious and worldly lives—one arrives at the conclusive knowledge that his ﷺ compassion for his Community was greater than that of any father for his child.

Furthermore, by examining the wonders displayed in his actions, and the marvels of the Unseen that he communicated through the Qur’ān and his sayings, as well as his prophecies about the end times and how they have been fulfilled, one arrives at conclusive knowledge that he reached the level of perception that lies beyond the intellect, wherein the eye opened for him through which the things of the unseen, invisible except to the chosen few and beyond the scope of the intellect, are apprehended.

This is the way to achieve necessary knowledge of the truthfulness of the Prophet ﷺ. Try it, ponder the Qur’ān, and study the Traditions, and you will see it for yourself.

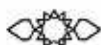
That is sufficient as warning to those who espouse philosophy. The reason why I mentioned it at all is that there is a dire need for it in the present day. Let us turn now to the fourth cause of the weakening of faith, which is the poor conduct of religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*). This malady may be treated by three things.

The first that if you claim that a given scholar consumes something unlawful, you should remember that he knows that it is unlawful just as you know that wine, pork and usury are unlawful. But you might know that something is unlawful and do it anyway—not because you do not believe that it is sinful, but simply because your vain desire overcomes you. His desire is no different from yours, and it might overwhelm him just as it overwhelms you. His education differentiates him from you, but it does not give him any special power to resist a given sin any better than you can. Many a person who believes in medicine may eat an apple or drink cold

water even if the doctor warns him not to! This does not mean that it is not harmful, or that his belief in medicine is not genuine. That is how the sins of religious scholars should be understood.

Secondly, the layman should be told: "You ought to believe that the scholar has taken his knowledge as a treasure for himself in the Hereafter, and that he believes that his knowledge will be his salvation and will intercede for him and the merit of his knowledge will make up for any shortcomings in his deeds. It is possible that his knowledge might be an argument against him, but equally possible that it might cause his rank to be raised. If he is remiss in action, he still provides guidance with his knowledge. If as a layman you look to him and become remiss in action yourself, though you are bereft of knowledge, your poor conduct will be your ruin, and you will have nothing to fall back on for intercession!"

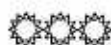
Thirdly—and this is the truth of the matter—a genuine religious scholar does not sin persistently at all, but only makes rare slips. True knowledge tells you that sin is a deadly poison, and that the Hereafter is better than the here-below. Anyone who knows this will not trade away what is better for what is worse. Yet such knowledge cannot be acquired by means of the kinds of study that most people pursue, which is why their knowledge only makes them more insolent in disobeying God Most High. True knowledge makes a person ever more reverent, fearful, and hopeful, which prevents him from sinning except for the rare moments of weakness to which no human being can be immune. That is not a sign of weak faith; the believer strays and then repents, and never persists in sin.



This is all I have to say about the errors and dangers of philosophy and *Ta'lim*, and of those who criticized them ineffectively. We ask

God Almighty to make us among those whom He has chosen, elected, and guided to the truth; whom He has inspired with His remembrance, so that they never forget Him; whom He has protected from the evils of their own souls, so that they never prefer anything to Him; and whom He has made His own, so that they worship none but Him.

Blessings and peace be upon our master Muḥammad, and upon his Family and Companions.





THE JUST BALANCE

al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm



*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE: THE BALANCES OF KNOWLEDGE

I begin by praising God Most High, and then by invoking blessings upon His Chosen Messenger. Brothers, will you lend me your ears, so that I may tell you of a conversation I had? Once while on a journey I encountered a proponent of the school of *Ta'lim* ("infallible teaching", Bāṭinism),ⁱ who unleashed upon me an onslaught of questions and arguments with the confidence of one who believes himself to stand on unshakeable ground.

HE SAID TO ME: I see that you claim to possess perfect knowledge. But in what scale do you weigh the true meaning of knowledge? Is it the scale of reasoned opinion (*ra'y*) and analogy (*qiyās*)? That

ⁱ *Ta'limiyya* was the name by which the Ismā'īlīs came to be known in Imam Ghazālī's home region of Khorāsan. Ḥasan-i Sabbāh, their leader in Alamūt, their stronghold in northern Iran, reformulated Ismā'īlī teachings; he placed extra emphasis on the authority of the Imam and his teaching (*Ta'lim*). See M.G.S. Hodgson, "Chapter 5: The Ismā'īlī State" in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 422-482, especially 472-482.

is an extremely contradictory and confusing standard, which has given rise to much disagreement among mankind. Or is it perhaps the balance of *Ta'lim*? If so, you are obliged to follow the infallible Imam, the Teacher; yet you do not seem eager to seek him.

I SAID: The scale of reasoned opinion and analogy? God forbid that I should depend on that! It is the balance of Satan. If any of my colleagues should claim that it is the true balance of knowledge, I ask God Most High to protect religion from his evil! He is an ignorant friend to religion, which is worse than being an intelligent enemy. Had he been blessed with the good fortune to follow the way of *Ta'lim*,ⁱ he would have learned how to argue from the Holy Qur'ān first of all, for God Most High says: *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel, and dispute with them in the manner that is best* (Qur'ān 16:125). He would know, furthermore, that what this verse means is that some people must be called to God with wisdom (*hikma*), others with counsel (*maw'iza*), and others with disputation (*mujādala*). If those who are naturally responsive to counsel are presented with wisdom, it will harm them, just as a nursing infant is harmed if fed meat. If disputation is employed with those who naturally respond to wisdom, they will be put off by it, just as a full-grown man is put off by the idea of being breastfed. And if disputation is employed with those who respond naturally to it, but not *in the manner that is best* as the Qur'ān describes it, it will be like feeding wheat bread to a nomad who is accustomed to eating dates, or feeding dates to a city dweller who is accustomed to wheat.

If only my colleague would follow the fine example of Abraham the Friend of God ﷺ, who said to his interlocutor: *My Lord is He who gives life and deals death* (Qur'ān 2:258)! Then when he saw that this did not have the desired effect upon his interlocutor,

i The author is deliberately speaking ambiguously here, as will become clear.

who responded, *I give life and I deal death*, Abraham changed his approach to something more suited to his nature and within his grasp: *Abraham said, 'Then God brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west', and thus was the disbeliever confounded.* Abraham did not bother to argue the point about how his interlocutor was not truly able to raise the dead, for he knew that this would be beyond his comprehension. He believed that to kill a person is to deal death to him, and the truth about this would not have suited his nature or fallen within the limits of his insight. It was not Abraham's goal to demolish his interlocutor, but to give him life. The way to do this was to nourish him with the proper food he needed to live; unanswerable arguments that lay beyond his limits would only have destroyed him. Such subtleties can only be apprehended by the light of knowledge borrowed from the illumination of the realm of Prophethood. That is why such colleagues of mine are deprived of understanding, for they are deprived of the true secret of the way of *Ta'lim*.

HE SAID: If you consider their way to be so odious, and their argument so weak, then what do you use to weigh your knowledge?

I SAID: I weigh it in the Just Balance, which shows me true from false, straight from crooked. In doing so, I follow God Most High and the infallible teaching of the Qur'ān as revealed through His Prophet ﷺ, wherein He says: *Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the just balance* (Qur'ān 17:35).

HE SAID: And what is this Just Balance?

I SAID: It comprises the five balances that God revealed in His Book, and by which He taught His Prophets how to weigh. To learn from God's Messenger and weigh with His balance is to be truly guided. To stray from them to reasoned opinion and analogy is to fall into error and misguidance.

HE SAID: Where is this balance described in the Qur'ān? This claim is patently false!

I SAID: Surely you must have heard what the Almighty says in Sūrat al-Raḥmān: *The All-Merciful taught the Qur'ān. He created man. He taught him speech. The sun and the moon run their reckoned course, and the plants and trees prostrate. And the heaven He raised, and the balance He set, that you transgress not in the balance, but observe the measure justly, and do not fall short in the balance* (Qur'ān 55:1-9). And surely you must have heard His Words in Sūrat al-Ḥadid: *Indeed We sent Our messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, that mankind might uphold justice* (Qur'ān 57:25). Do you suppose that the balance spoken of in the Qur'ān is the one in which wheat, barley, gold, and silver are weighed? Do you suppose that the balance He set when He raised the heavens—the *heaven He raised, and the balance He set*—was a coin balance or a steelyard? What an absurd notion, and what a patent falsehood! Fear God, and do not contrive far-fetched interpretations. Know with certainty that this balance is the balance of knowledge of God, and knowledge of His angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers, and His material and spiritual worlds. If you do, you will learn from His Prophets how to weigh with it, as they learned it from His angels. God Most High is the first Teacher, the second is Gabriel, and the third is the Messenger ﷺ. All of humankind learn from the Messengers, who are their sole means of attaining knowledge.

HE SAID: How can you know whether this balance is true or false? By using your intellect and reason? But minds can contradict one another. Or is it by following the infallible Imam, who upholds truth in the world? For that is my way, the way to which I invite others.

I SAID: I too know it by infallible teaching—but from the Imam of Imams, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib ﷺ. I cannot see him, but I can hear his teachings, which have been communicated through unbroken mass transmission that I cannot

doubt. His teaching is simply the Qur'ān. The patent truth of the Qur'ān's balances can be known from the Qur'ān itself.

HE SAID: Present your proof. Produce your balance from the Qur'ān, and show me how you understand it to be accurate and true, from the Qur'ān itself.

I SAID: First give me your own proof. Tell me how you know that the scales in which gold and silver are weighed are accurate and true. That is something that you must know if you owe a debt, so that you can repay it fully without any remission, or if a debt is owed to you, so that you may receive it justly without taking too much. If you go into a Muslim market and take a given weight of something, and pay for it or take it on credit, how can you be certain of avoiding either wronging people by giving too little, or else giving them too much?

HE SAID: I think well of my fellow Muslims and assume that they would not engage in commerce without first verifying the accuracy of their scales. If I had reason to doubt a scale, I would pick it up and examine the pans and needle. If the needle was level, not inclining toward either side, and the pans were balanced, I would conclude that the scale was accurate and sound.

I SAID: Supposing that the needle is level and the pans are balanced, how do you know that this makes the scale accurate?

HE SAID: I know it by necessity from two premises, one empirical and the other sensory. The empirical premise is that I know from experience that a heavy thing sinks downwards; and the heavier it is, the further down it goes. I say, therefore, that if one of the pans were heavier it would be lower. This is a universal empirical premise which I hold to be true by necessity. The second premise is that I can see that this particular scale does not have any imbalance in its pans, and that they are perfectly level. This premise is sensory, as I see it with my own eyes. I have no doubt as to the sensory premise or the aforementioned empirical premise. These

two premises produce in my heart a necessary conclusion, which is that the scale is balanced. I say that if either pan were heavier it would be lower, and I observe with my senses that neither one is lower. I therefore conclude that neither one is heavier.

I SAID: But this is reasoned opinion and rational analogy!

HE SAID: Certainly not! This is necessary knowledge dictated by undeniable premises, the certainty of which has been attained through experience and sense-perception. How can it be reasoned opinion and analogy? Analogy is mere guesswork that cannot give rise to certainty, yet in this case I feel absolutely certain.

I SAID: If you can determine the accuracy of the scale by this proof, how can you determine the accuracy of the weights used in it? What if the weight is lighter or heavier than it is supposed to be?

HE SAID: If I have doubts about that, I weigh it against a weight that I know to be accurate. If they are balanced, then I know that whatever amount of gold balances with that weight will be equal to my own weight, for the equal of the equal is equal.

I SAID: Do you know who was the first person ever to establish the scale, the original maker from whom this weighing process was learned?

HE SAID: No. Why should I need to? I know from firsthand viewing that the scale is accurate. I eat vegetables without enquiring about the farm on which they were grown! The original maker of the scale is not important in himself. All that matters is the accuracy of the scale and the method of weighing. But I already know that, as I have demonstrated, so I need not consult the original maker of the scale every time I want to weigh something. That would be time-consuming and sometimes impossible; and besides, I have no reason to do it.

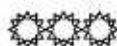
I SAID: If I presented you with a scale for knowledge that is just as sound as this, and indeed even sounder, and also told you the identity of its founder, its teacher, and its user—and if its founder

was God Most High, its teacher was Gabriel, and its users were Abraham, Muḥammad, and the other Prophets, to whose truthfulness God Himself has borne witness—would you accept it from me and believe in it?

HE SAID: Of course, by God! Why would I not, if it were demonstrated every bit as soundly as what I have just described to you?

I SAID: I can see that you are an intelligent man, and that I was right to hope that you might be set right and made to understand the true nature of your way of infallible teaching. I will tell you of the five balances revealed in the Qur'ān, which will free you of the need for any imam and carry you beyond the limits of the blind. Your imam will be the Chosen Prophet, your leader the Qur'ān, and your standard will be firsthand witnessing.

Know that the balances of the Qur'ān are basically three: the Balance of Equilibrium (*ta'ādul*), the Balance of Consequence (*talāzum*), and the Balance of Contradiction (*ta'ānud*). However, the Balance of Equilibrium is divided into three parts: greater, middle, and lesser, which makes five in all.





CHAPTER 2

THE GREATER BALANCE OF EQUILIBRIUM

My intelligent companion from the proponents of *Ta'lim* then said to me: Explain the greater scale of equilibrium to me first, and explain to me these terms as well—equilibrium, consequence, and contradiction; greater, middle, and lesser—for they are unfamiliar to me, and without doubt have their subtle shades of meaning.

I SAID: You will not understand the meanings of the terms until they have been explained and their meanings comprehended, whereupon you will see how each term is appropriate for what it designates.

First, I will tell you how this balance resembles the one you described to me—in meaning, not in form. It is a spiritual (*rūḥānī*) balance, and so it is not exactly equivalent to the material balance. Yet there is no reason why they should be exactly alike, since even material balances are not all alike. The steelyard and the coin balance are both balances, after all. What is more, the astrolabe is a balance for measuring the motions of the stars, the ruler a balance for measuring linear distances, the plumb-bob a balance for measuring verticality and inclination. They have different forms, but their common purpose is to identify increase and decrease. Even the art of prosody is a balance for poetry, a way to identify

meters and determine a line's scansion. This is more a spiritual than a physical balance, although it is not altogether detached from physicality, since ultimately it measures sounds that are produced by physical bodies. The most spiritual balance of all is the balance of the Day of Resurrection, in which the deeds, beliefs, and knowledge of mankind will be weighed. None of these are physical objects, making this balance entirely spiritual.

The Qur'ān's balance of knowledge is likewise a spiritual balance, although in the visible world its definition is bound in a container that is connected to physical bodies; but it is not a body itself. In this world, the definition of the other must be done aurally—that is, by sound, which is a physical thing—or by writing, which consists of symbols inscribed on paper and is also physical. Yet that is the property of its container, the vehicle by which it is presented. As for the content itself, it is purely spiritual and has no connection to physical bodies, since it is used for weighing the knowledge of God, which lies outside the sensorial world; for He transcends any attribution of direction or location, let alone physicality. Nevertheless, the balance consists of a beam and two pans; the pans are suspended from the beam, and the beam is common to the two pans because both are attached to it. This is the Balance of Equilibrium.

As for the Balance of Consequence, it is more like a steelyard balance because it has just one pan with a ball on the other side to indicate the distinctions and measures.

HE SAID: There is certainly plenty of noise in all this, but where is the meaning? I hear the grinding, but I see no flour!ⁱ

I SAID: Be patient! *Do not hasten with the Qur'ān until its revelation has been completed to you, and say, 'My Lord, increase*

i A proverbial expression meaning that one has heard the talk but has seen no action.

me in knowledge! (Qur'ān 20:114). Haste is from Satan, and deliberateness is from God. Know that the greater balance is the balance of Abraham the Friend ﷺ, who employed it with Nimrod. It was from him that we learned this balance, but through the Qur'ān. Nimrod claimed to be a god, a term which was recognized to mean "one with the power to do anything." Therefore Abraham said, "The true god is my God, for He *gives life and deals death* (Qur'ān 2:258). He can do this, but you cannot." Nimrod replied, *I give life and deal death*, meaning that he gave life to a drop of sperm by conception, and dealt death by killing. Abraham knew that Nimrod would find it difficult to understand the falsity of this argument, so he shifted to a more obvious line and said, *'Then God brings the sun from the east, so bring it from the west', and thus was the disbeliever confounded*. God Most High praised Abraham, saying, *That was Our argument, which We gave to Abraham against his people* (Qur'ān 6:83).

From this, you can see that the demonstrative proof lay in Abraham's balance. View the way he weighed his argument in the same light as you viewed the scale with which gold and silver are weighed, and you will see that this argument contains two premisesⁱ which were joined together to produce a conclusion, namely knowledge. For the Qur'ān is based on ellipsis and concision. If we were to elaborate the balance fully, we would present his argument as follows:

First premise: "Any being that can cause the sun to rise is God."

Second premise: "My God is able to make the sun rise."

i The author uses the term *aṣl* ("root" or "principle") to refer to "premise" from here on, rather than the more usual *muqaddima*, which his interlocutor used earlier on for the same concept. His intention was likely to minimize the use of technical terms throughout this particular work, which presents familiar concepts of logic as though discovered anew in an Islamic light.

Necessary conclusion: "My God is God—not you, Nimrod."

Ask yourself: could anyone admit the two premises, but doubt the conclusion? And could anyone doubt the principles themselves? Certainly not! No one could doubt that "any being that can cause the sun to rise is God," for they and all others recognized that the term "God" designates "one with the power to do anything," and "causing the sun to rise" is one of those things. This premise is known by convention and by consensus. Then our claim that "the one who is able to make the sun rise is someone other than you" is known by observation, for it is observable fact that this is beyond the power of Nimrod and all others except for Him who moves the sun; and by "God," we mean the One Who moves the sun and makes it rise. Recognition of the first premise, which is known by agreed-upon convention, and the second premise, which is known by observation, obliges us to conclude that Nimrod is not God, and that God Most High is God.

Now ask yourself: do you find this to be clearer than the empirical and sensory premises upon which you based the accuracy of the balance for gold?

HE SAID: This knowledge is necessarily true, and I cannot doubt the two premises or the necessity of the conclusion that follows from them. However, that does not help me in any situation but this particular one, and in the particular manner in which Abraham the Friend  employed it, which was to deny the divinity of Nimrod and affirm it for the only One Who can cause the sun to rise. How can I weigh all other problematic matters by the same balance, and use it to tell truth from falsehood?

I SAID: If you can weigh gold in a scale, you can weigh silver and other precious materials in the same scale. The scale tells you the weight of the gold, not because it is gold but because that is how much it weighs. Likewise, this argument reveals to us this

knowledge not because of the knowledge itself but because it is one truth among many, one idea among many. We should ponder why this conclusion necessarily follows from it, and try to grasp the spirit of the thing and disengage it from this particular example, so that we may utilize it whenever we please.

The reason why the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises is that a judgment rendered on an attribute is necessarily also rendered on the thing it attributes. In this particular argument, this may be summarized as follows: "My Lord causes the sun to rise; the one who causes the sun to rise is a god; therefore it must follow that my Lord is a god." Causing the sun to rise is the attribute of the Lord, and we have judged that anything endowed with this attribute is divine; therefore it must follow that the Lord is divine. The same applies in any situation: if I know something about the attribute of a thing, and I know something else that affirms a particular judgment regarding that attribute, this will give me knowledge of a third thing, namely that this judgment necessarily applies to the object qualified by that attribute.ⁱ

HE SAID: This is almost too subtle for me to understand. If I am in doubt, what am I to do to assuage this doubt?

I SAID: Measure it against the reference weight that you know to be accurate, as you did with the balance for gold and silver.

HE SAID: How can I do that? Where is the reference weight for such matters?

I SAID: The reference weight consists of the primary necessary truths,ⁱⁱ whether they be ascertained through sense-perception, experience, or instinctively through the intellect. Consider these

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- i For example: "Apples are fruits; this object is an apple; therefore this object is a fruit."
 - ii Chelhot, the editor of the Arabic text of *al-Qistās*, notes here that in *al-Mustazhiri*, Ghazālī defines "necessary" (*darūri*) truth as "that which is commonly apprehended by all intelligent people."

primary truths: can you conceive of a situation in which a judgment concerning a given attribute would not also apply to an object endowed with that attribute? Suppose that an animal passes in front of you with a swollen belly, and you see that it is a mule. Someone says, "It must be pregnant." You say to him, "Do you know that mules are sterile and cannot reproduce?" He replies, "Yes, I know it by experience." You say, "Do you know that this animal is a mule?" He looks and then replies, "Yes, I know it by sense and vision." You say, "So now do you realize that it cannot be pregnant?" He could not possibly doubt this after acknowledging those two premises, one of which is empirical, the other sensorial. On the contrary, he will know by necessity that the animal is not pregnant. That necessary knowledge will be the product of his knowledge of those two facts, just as your knowledge about the balance is the product of your empirical knowledge that the heavier pan sinks down, and your sensorial knowledge that neither of the pans is lower than the other.

HE SAID: I understand this clearly now, but it is not clear to me how it is necessarily the result of the principle that a judgment rendered on an attribute is also rendered upon the object endowed with that attribute.

I SAID: Think carefully. To say "this is a mule" is an attribution, with "mule" being the attribute. To say "all mules are sterile" is a judgment of sterility of this attribute of "mule." This necessitates that the judgment of sterility be rendered upon any animal that is described by the attribute "mule."

Another example: if it is evident to you that every animal is sensate, and then it is evident to you that the worm is an animal, you will not be able to doubt that the worm is sensate. The method of this is to say: "every worm is an animal, and every animal is sensate, and therefore every worm is sensate." To say "every worm is an animal" is to describe the worm with the attribute of "animal."

If you judge that all animals are sensate, or corporeal, or otherwise, this must apply to the worm. That is necessary and cannot be doubted. It is true that this depends on the condition that the attribute be as broad as, or broader than, whatever it describes, such that the judgment on it will necessarily include it.ⁱ

An example from Islamic law: if a person accepts that all wine is intoxicating, and that all intoxicants are forbidden, he will be unable to doubt that all wine is forbidden. This is because "intoxicating" is an attribute of wine, and so the judgment of "forbidden" must apply to wine, since by attribution it is necessarily included in it. The same applies to all kinds of speculative matters.

HE SAID: I certainly understand that when premises are coupled in this way, they produce a necessary conclusion. I also understand that the argument of Abraham عليه السلام was sound, and that his balance was true. I have learned the principle and true meaning behind this, and how it corresponds to the reference weight that I know to be accurate. However, I would like to have some examples of how this balance is used in problematic areas of science. The examples you have provided are so intuitively obvious that they scarcely require any balance or argument at all.

I SAID: Far from it! Some of these example are not intuitively obvious but are products of the marriage of two premises. No one would know that the animal is sterile unless he could identify it as a mule, by the use of his senses, and also possessed the empirical knowledge that mules are sterile. The only self-evident thing is the principle itself. The product engendered by two premises requires a "mother" and "father." It is not evident in itself, but only because of others. Yet those others, by which I mean the premises, can be obvious in certain situations, namely after experience and

i "Some worms are animals" would fail to satisfy this condition in the example above, while "all worms are animals" does satisfy it.

observation. The fact that wine is forbidden is not obvious in itself, but only by means of two premises: that wine is intoxicating, which is known by experience; and that every intoxicant is forbidden, which is known by revelation.ⁱ

This should show you how to weigh by this balance, and how to use it. If you would like a more obscure example, I could provide you with unlimited ones. In fact, it was by means of this balance that I came to understand most obscure matters. For now, be content with a single obscure example.

One obscure question is whether man came to exist by himself, or whether he has a cause and a maker—and likewise with the world itself. If we refer to this balance, we will see that he has a maker, and that his maker must be endowed with knowledge. We can say: "Every possibility has a cause; the existence of man in his particular form is possible; therefore man must have a cause." The same can be said of the world. Anyone who admits the first two premises cannot possibly doubt the conclusion. If he doubts the premises, however, they can each be proved by clear premises of their own, and so on, back to the primary truths that cannot be doubted. The evident primary truths are the foundations of the subtle obscure truths, their seeds; and anyone skilled in cultivating them can produce their fruits by marrying them together.

You might object, "I deny both of these premises. Why do you say that every possibility requires a cause? Why do you say that the existence of man in his particular form is possible, and not necessary?"

To this I would reply that "Every possibility has a cause" is obviously true if you understand the meaning of "possible." By "possible" I mean that which is poised between two equal categories [existence

i Another version of the text has: "which is known from Traditions of the Lawgiver ﷺ."

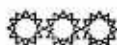
and nonexistence]. If two things are equal, neither of them can be marked by existence or nonexistence of its own accord, since it is necessarily true that if something is affirmed for a thing, it must also be affirmed for anything like it. This is an elementary truth.

Then my claim that "the existence of man in his particular form is possible, and not necessary" is like saying that a line of a specific length drawn by a scribe is possible; for a line *qua* line does not have to have any specific length, but can be envisaged as short or long. Its specific measure, be it short or long, is caused by the agent, without doubt. Any particular length is equally possible for the line, by necessity. The same applies to the form of man, which could have any particular measure. If a specific measure is allotted to him, it must therefore have an agent.

I can then move on from here and assert that this agent must be possessed of knowledge. Every action that is systematic and orderly must be attributed to the knowledge of an agent; the structure of man is systematic and orderly; and therefore its order must be attributed to the knowledge of an agent.

Here, then, are two premises which, once admitted, do not allow for any doubt in the conclusion. One is that the structure of the human being is systematic, which can be observed by examining the harmony of his body parts and how each of them has a propensity for a particular function: the hand for grasping, the foot for walking. The science of anatomy provides necessary knowledge of this. As for the assertion that a systematic orderly object requires knowledge, it is also evident. No intelligent person doubts that so much as a straight line could be drawn by someone with no knowledge of writing, even if it is done by means of a pen which itself is devoid of knowledge. Nor can they doubt that no building suitable for shelter, whether a house, public bath, mill, or another, could come into existence by any means but that of an agent who knows how to build.

If any of that could be doubted, our method would be to shift to something more obvious, and to continue to do so until we arrived back at the primary truths. But it is not our aim to explain this in full here. Our aim is to show that the coupling of primary truths in the manner displayed by Abraham the Friend ﷺ is a true balance that guides one to knowledge of the truth. No one can deny this, for to do so would be to deny God's teaching to His Prophets, and to deny what God Almighty praises, for He says: *That was Our argument, which We gave to Abraham against his people* (Qur'ān 6:83). Infallible teaching is true for certain, even if reasoned opinion is not; and to deny this balance would be to deny both reasoned opinion and infallible teaching, which no one can do.





CHAPTER 3

THE MIDDLE BALANCE OF EQUILIBRIUM

HE SAID: I understand the greater balance and its principle, standard, and general use. Now explain the middle balance to me: what is it, where did its teaching come from, who founded it, and who used it?

I SAID: The middle balance too is from Abraham the Friend ﷺ, when he said, *I love not things that set* (Qur'ān 6:76).ⁱ The full form of this balance is: "the moon sets; a god does not set; therefore the moon cannot be a god," but the Qur'ān is based on concision and ellipsis. However, the knowledge that the moon is not divine does not become necessary until these premises are admitted, namely that the moon sets, while a god does not set. If they are admitted, the knowledge that the moon is not divine becomes necessary.

HE SAID: I do not doubt that the knowledge that the moon is not divine is produced by these premises, as long as both are admitted. However, I know that the moon sets, for this is known by sense-perception, but I cannot say that "a god does not set" is something known by necessity or by sense-perception.

i Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely become one of those who are astray.' (Qur'ān 6:76)

I SAID: My purpose in telling of this balance is not to convince you that the moon is not a god, but to show you that this balance is true, and that knowledge attained through weighing by it is necessary. In the case of Abraham عليه السلام, he attained this knowledge because he already took it as given that a god does not set. That was not something he knew as a first principle, but rather something he deduced by pairing together other premises to produce the knowledge that a god is not subject to change, that everything that changes must be contingent, and that setting is a kind of change. He based this weighing on things already known to him. You should take the balance and use it whenever you have knowledge of the premises.

HE SAID: I understand necessarily that this balance is true, and that this knowledge is necessarily implied by the premises as long as the premises are admitted. But I would like you to explain the principle and true meaning of this balance, and then explain to me how it corresponds to the standard weight that I know to be accurate, and then provide me with an example of its use on an obscure problem. The disproof of the moon's divinity is already obvious to me.

I SAID: Its principle is that if there are two things, one of which is characterized by an attribute that the other lacks, they must be distinct; that is, the one does not belong to the other, and is not characterized by it. The principle of the greater balance is that whatever rule applies to the general must necessarily apply to the particular; the principle of the middle balance is that if something is negated in respect of one thing and affirmed for another thing, those things must be different. A god cannot set, the moon does set, and therefore there must be a distinction between God and the moon, which is that the moon is not a god, and God is not the moon.

God taught His Prophet Muḥammad عليه السلام how to weigh by this balance in many places in the Qur'ān, to follow the example of

his father Abraham عليه السلام. Two examples should suffice, and you may study the Qur'ān for the rest.

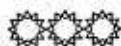
The first is found in God's Words to His Prophet: *The Jews and Christians say: 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.' Say, 'Why, then, does He torment you for your sins?' No, you are but mortals from among those He created.* (Qur'ān 5:18). They claimed that they were the children of God, so God Most High taught him how to expose their error by using the Just Balance. The full development of this balance is as follows: "Children are not tormented; you are tormented; therefore you are not children [of God]." There are two premises here: "children are not tormented," which is known by experience; and "you are tormented," which is known by observation. The necessary conclusion of this is that they are not God's children.

The second is found in His Words: *Say, 'O you Jews, if you claim that of all people you alone are the friends of God, then long for death, if what you say is true.' But they will never long for it* (Qur'ān 62:6-7). They claimed to be friends of God, and it is known that the true friend of God (*walī*, saint) longs to meet his Lord. Yet it is known that they do not long for death, which is the means for this meeting. It necessarily follows, therefore, that they are not the friends of God. The full development of the balance is as follows: "every friend hopes to meet his friend; the Jew does not hope to meet God; therefore he cannot be a friend of God." The logical principle is that this hope is an attribute of the friend of God, but not of the Jew, and therefore the Jew is not a friend of God.ⁱ

i Strictly speaking, the conclusion of this syllogism would be the reverse: "God is not the Friend of a Jew." The Qur'ānic observation in question, like certain others (e.g. in Qur'ān 5:82, that Christians are the most well-disposed people toward Muslims), applies to Jews as a collectivity, and does not exclude the possibility of exceptions.

As for how it corresponds to the standard weight that is known to be accurate, I do not think that you need to have this elaborated, given how obvious it is. But if you would like it clarified, then consider how you know that a stone is an inanimate object, and you also know that a human being is not inanimate, and how this obliges you to acknowledge that a human being is not a stone. This is because inanimateness is affirmed for a stone but negated for a human being, and so a human being cannot belong to the class of stones, nor can a stone belong to the class of human beings. Man is not a stone, nor is a stone a man.

As for its applicability to obscure problems, there are many such examples. One of the two halves of all knowledge is knowing what divine transcendence (*taqdis*) is, namely knowing that which must be negated in respect of God on account of His transcendence of it. All knowledge of God is weighed by this balance. Abraham  himself used this balance to affirm the divine transcendence, and taught us how to do likewise. By this balance, he knew that corporeality must be negated in respect of God Most High. The same can be done to prove that God is not a localized substance (*jawhar mutahayyiz*): God is not caused; any localized substance must have something that causes it to be localized where it is; therefore God is not a substance. We can also prove that God is not an accident (*'arad*): an accident cannot be living and knowing; God is both Living and Knowing; therefore He is not an accident. All the aspects of divine transcendence can be produced by juxtaposing premises in this manner: a negative premise denoting negation, a positive premise denoting affirmation, and a resulting conclusion that brings knowledge of negation [of contingency] and transcendence.





CHAPTER 4

THE LESSER BALANCE OF EQUILIBRIUM

HE SAID: I understand this clearly and necessarily. Explain to me the lesser balance: its principle, its standard, and its use for obscure problems.

I SAID: The lesser balance is something we have learned from God Most High, Who taught it to Muḥammad ﷺ in the Qur'ān, notably in His Words, *They esteemed not God as He ought to be esteemed when they said, 'God has not sent down anything to any man.' Say, 'Who sent down the Book that Moses brought, a light and guidance for mankind?'* (Qur'ān 6:91).

The means to weigh by this is to argue that their claim that "No revelation has been sent down to any man" is false due to a conclusion produced by the pairing of two premises. The first is "Moses is a man," and the second is "Moses had revelation sent down to him." This necessarily implies something, which is that "some men did have revelation sent down to them." This refutes the universal statement that no revelation was ever sent down to any man. The first premise, "Moses is a man," is known by sense-perception. The second, "Moses had revelation sent down to him," was something they already admitted, for it was their custom to conceal some parts of this revelation and disclose other

parts. As God Most High says: *Who sent down the Book that Moses brought, a light and guidance for mankind, which you set down on parchments, disclosing some but hiding much?* (Qur'ān 6:91). This was said in the spirit of disputation *in the manner that is best* (Qur'ān 16:125), wherein it is enough that the premises be admitted by both sides and commonly known to them, even if an outsider might doubt them. Anyone who admits both premises is bound by the conclusion. Most of the arguments in the Qur'ān are of this kind. If you feel that you may harbor doubts about any of these premises and principles, remember that such arguments are directed at those who do not doubt those premises. For your part, you must learn how to use the balance to weigh all such matters.

The standard of this balance is that if someone says, "It is inconceivable that an animal could move without legs," but then you say, "Snakes are animals, and they can move without legs," he will necessarily understand that in fact some animals can move without legs, and therefore that his assertion has been proven false.

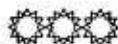
This balance can be employed for many obscure problems. For instance, a person might say, "Every lie is inherently evil." We might reply, "Suppose that someone sees a saint hiding from a tyrant, and the tyrant asks him where the saint is. If he hides him, is that a lie?" He would respond, "Yes." We would say, "Is that evil?" He would reply, "No—the evil thing would be to tell the truth and send the saint to his death." We would then say: "Consider the balance: we say that to hide the saint would be lying; this is a known premise. We also say that it would not be evil; this is a second premise. The necessary conclusion is that not every lie is evil."

Consider now: is there any room to doubt this conclusion, if the premises are admitted? Is this not even clearer than the example I gave for the empirical and sensorial premises with respect to the balance of divine transcendence?

The principle of the balance is that if two attributes describe a single thing, this means that some of one of the two attributes must apply to the other, but not necessarily to all of them. The most that can be said is that it must necessarily describe *some* of them, but it does not necessarily follow that it describes *all* of them. A human being is an animal, and also a body. This necessarily means that *some* bodies are animals, but it does not mean that *all* bodies are animals. Be careful not to be deceived by the fact that all animals can be described as bodies! Even if every member of one class happens to share the attribute of the other, as long as that is not of necessity, the knowledge resulting from it is not necessary.

HE SAID: I understand these three balances. But why did you call the first the greater, the second the middle, and the third the lesser?

I SAID: Because the greater comprises many things, the lesser only a few, and the middle is between them. The first balance is the broadest of them all, since it can produce knowledge both of general and specific affirmations and of general and specific negations. Thus it is possible to weigh four types of knowledge in this balance. The second balance is only useful for weighing negations, although it can be used for both general and specific negations. The third balance is useful only for specifics, as I explained, as it proves that some of the one attribute also characterizes the other, because they both exist in one given thing. Seeing that this balance is useful only for specific and partial judgments, it is only right to call it the lesser balance. To weigh general judgments in this balance is certainly the way of Satan, and the proponents of *Ta'lim* base some of their teachings on such weighing. Satan also cast this suggestion into the aspiration of Abraham the Friend , which is why he said [of the sun], *This is my Lord; this is greater* (Qur'ān 6:78). I will relate his story to you later.





CHAPTER 5

THE BALANCE OF CONSEQUENCE

HE SAID: Explain to me the Balance of Consequence. I understand the three categories of the Balance of Equilibrium.

I SAID: This balance can be derived from God's Words, *Had there been gods other than God in the two [Realms], both would have surely gone to ruin* (Qur'ān 21:22); *Had there been other gods besides Him, as they say, they would surely have sought a way to the Lord of the Throne* (Qur'ān 17:42); and *Had they been gods, they never would have come to it* (Qur'ān 21:99).

This balance may be elucidated as follows: "If the world had two gods, it would go to ruin" is one premise; "It is a fact that it has not gone to ruin" is a second premise; and the necessary conclusion drawn from this is, "There are not two gods." If there were any other gods but the Lord of the Throne, they would surely have sought a way to the Lord of the Throne; it is a known fact that none have done so; therefore there are no gods other than the Lord of the Throne.

The standard of this balance by analogy with the physical standard-weight is as follows. If the sun is risen, the stars are obscured; this is known empirically. It is a fact that the sun is risen; this is

known by sense-perception. We may therefore conclude that the stars are obscured.

Here is another example. If So-and-So has eaten, he is full; this is known empirically. It is a fact that he has eaten; this is known by sense-perception. It therefore follows from the empirical and sensorial premises that he is full.

This balance is useful for difficult problems. For example, a jurist might say: "If the sale of an absent item were valid, it would become binding at the moment of agreement. But it is a known fact that such a transaction does not become binding at the moment of agreement. Consequently, the sale of an absent item is not valid." The first premise is known by jurisprudential induction, which provides confidence, if not sure knowledge. The second premise is known by the interlocutor's admission and support.

Or, turning to a speculative matter, we might say: "If the structure of the world and the composition of man are systematic, orderly, and marvelous, then their maker must be knowing; this is something innately obvious to the intellect. And it is a fact that they are marvelous and systematic; this is observable to the eye. Consequently, the Maker must be knowing."

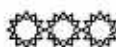
We can then go further and say: "If its Maker is knowing, He must be living. The first balance established the fact that He is knowing. Consequently, He must be living." We then say: "If He is knowing and living, He must be self-subsistent, and cannot be an accident. The two previous balances told us that He is living and knowing. Consequently, He must be self-subsistent."

Thus we have ascended from the constitution of the human being to the attribute of his Maker, namely knowledge, and then from knowledge to life, and then from life to the Essence. This is spiritual ascension, and these balances form a stairway leading up to heaven, or rather to the Creator of heaven, with the premises

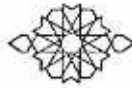
as their steps. As for bodily ascension, it is beyond any ordinary human power, and reserved solely for the power of Prophethood.

The principle of this balance is that if something is consequent to a thing, it necessarily follows from it. If the consequent (*lāzim*) is absent, the antecedent (*malzūm*) must necessarily be absent; if the antecedent is present, the consequent must necessarily be present. If the consequent is present but the antecedent is not, this does not produce any conclusion at all, although the balance of Satan attempts to suggest otherwise.¹ Some proponents of *Ta'lim* base their teachings on such balances.

Consider how the validity of ritual prayer is necessarily consequent to the ritual purity of the one who performs the prayer. It is undeniably correct to state, "If Zayd's prayer is valid, he must be ritually pure. It is a fact that he is not ritually pure," negating the consequent, "and therefore his prayer must not be valid," negating the antecedent. It would also be correct to say, "It is a fact that his prayer is valid," affirming the antecedent, "and therefore he must be ritually pure," affirming the consequent. However, it would be fallacious to say, "It is a fact that he is ritually pure, and therefore his prayer must be valid," because it could be that his prayer is invalid for some other reason. The presence of the consequent does not necessarily entail the presence of the antecedent. Likewise, if you said, "It is a fact that his prayer is not valid, and therefore he must not be ritually pure," that would also be fallacious because it does not necessarily follow.



i This alludes to the fallacy of affirming the consequent, as in: "If John had inherited a fortune, he would be rich; John is rich; therefore John must have inherited a fortune." This is fallacious because John may have become rich by some other means. The antecedent (John is rich) is present, but the consequent (John inherited a fortune) is not known from the premises, and so it is fallacious to affirm it.



CHAPTER 6

THE BALANCE OF CONTRADICTION

HE SAID: Now explain to me the Balance of Contradiction, and tell me where in the Qur'ān it is found, what its standard is, and how it is used.

I SAID: It is found in the Qur'ān in God Most High's Words of instruction to His Prophet ﷺ: Say, *'Who provides for you from the heavens and the earth?'* Say, *'God. And truly either we or you are upon guidance or in manifest error'* (Qur'ān 34:24). The words *or you* are not meant to denote doubt or equivalence, but rather they imply another premise, which is: "We are not in error when we say that God provides for you from the heavens and earth; for it is He Who sends down the provision of rain from heaven, and causes crops to grow from the earth. Therefore it must be you who are in error, since you deny this."

The full form of the balance is as follows: "Either we are you are in manifest error" is the first premise; "it is a fact that we are not in error" is the second; and the necessary conclusion produced by their pairing is, "you are in error."

The analogy of this balance with a physical standard-weight is that if a person entered a house in which there are only two rooms, and we went into one of those rooms and did not see him,

we would necessarily conclude that he must be in the other room. This is due to the pairing of two premises; the first is "he must be in one of the two rooms," and the second is "he is not in this room." The necessary conclusion is that he must be in the other room. We therefore know that he is in the second room, whether by seeing him in there or by seeing that the other room is empty. If we know it by seeing him in there, our knowledge is visual; if we know it by not seeing him in the other room, our knowledge is drawn from this balance, and is every bit as certain as the visual knowledge.

The principle of this balance is that when anything is limited to two categories, the affirmation of one category must negate the other, and the negation of one must affirm the other—provided that this categorization is exclusive, not inclusive. Employing it to weigh inclusive categories is the way of Satan, and some of the proponents of *Ta'lim* employ such weighing in many of their statements, as I have shown in my books *al-Qawāsim* (The Decisive Blows), *Jawāb miṣṣal al-khilāf* (Settling the Dispute),ⁱ *al-Mustazhiri*, and others.

Its usefulness for tackling obscure problems is limitless, and it may be that most speculative matters fall within its ambit. If someone denies the existence of any eternal being, we would tell him, "It must be that all beings are temporal, or that some are eternal," which is an exclusive categorization, since it must either be affirmed or denied. Then we say, "It is a fact that they are not all temporal, which means that some of them must be eternal." He will object, "Why should you say that they are not all temporal?" We reply, "If they were all temporal, that would mean that they came into existence spontaneously without a cause, or that some of them came to exist without a cause. But a temporal being cannot come into existence at a given moment without any cause, and therefore they cannot all be temporal. This means that there

i These two books are believed to be among the lost works of Imam Ghazālī.

must be an eternal being." There are countless other applications for this balance.

HE SAID: I understand for certain that all of these balances are sound. However, I would like to know the meaning of their titles: why is the first called the Balance of Equilibrium, the second Consequence, and the third Contradiction?

I SAID: I called the first the Balance of Equilibrium because it comprises two premises that are equal, like two level pans in a scale. I called the second the Balance of Consequence because one of the premises contains two parts, one a consequence and the other an antecedent, such as: *Had there been gods other than God in the two [Realms], both would have surely gone to ruin* (Qur'ān 21:22), wherein *both would have surely gone to ruin* is the consequence and *Had there been gods other than God* is the antecedent, with the conclusion following from the negation of the consequence. I called the third the Balance of Contradiction because it boils down to the restriction of two categories between negation and affirmation, such that the affirmation of one negates the other, and the negation of one affirms the other. This means that the two categories are opposite and contradictory.

HE SAID: Did you invent these names yourself? Did you deduce the balances independently, or did someone else do it before you?

I SAID: The names are my invention; as for the balances themselves, I deduced them from the Qur'ān, and I think I was the first to do so. But they were known in principle to others before me; the later ones who deduced them called them different names from those I used. In the times of the ancient communities before Muḥammad and Jesus they had other names still, learned from the scriptures of Abraham and Moses—may blessings and peace be upon them all.

What inspired me to dress them up in different names was that I recognized the weakness in your disposition, and your

susceptibility to illusions. I saw that you were so deluded by external appearances that if you were given red honey to drink from a surgeon's cupping-glass, you would be unable to drink it because of your natural aversion to the vessel, and your mind's incapability of recognizing that honey is pure no matter what vessel it is served in. You might see a Turk wearing a patched robe or an open cloak, and take him to be a Sufi or a jurist; but if a Sufi put on a caftan and tall cap, you would fancy him a Turk. Your fancy always induces you to judge things by their shells, not their cores. You do not judge statements on what they actually say, but on their aesthetic appeal or your opinion of the one who speaks them. If you deem a statement to be aesthetically unappealing, or think ill of the one who makes it, you reject it even if it is true. If someone told you to say, "There is no god but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God," you would find yourself naturally averse to this, and say, "This is what the Christians say. How can I say it?" You would not have the wit to recognize that this statement is in fact true, and that the Christian is objectionable not because of this statement or any others except for just two: one is that he says, "Muhammad is not a Messenger," and the other is that he says, "God is the Third of Three." Aside from this, everything he says is true.

So when I saw you and your fellow proponents of *Ta'lim* to be weak-minded and convinced only by externals, I came down to your level and presented the medicine to you in your own water-jug. I treated you as kindly as a doctor does his patient, and nursed you to health. If I had told you that it was medicine from the onset, and presented it to you in a medicine cup, you would have been naturally averse to it; and even if you had accepted it, you would have been barely able to swallow it. That is my excuse for inventing new names for these concepts. Those who recognize

the truth of this will acknowledge it, and those who are ignorant of it will deny it.

HE SAID: I understand all of this—but what about the promise you made to show how this balance has two pans and a beam to which both pans are attached? I cannot see how these balances have pans or beams. And what was that you said about some of them being more like a steelyard balance?

I SAID: Do you recall how in each balance, the argument was made from two premises? Each premise is a pan, and the element that is common to both premises, and is found in them both, is the beam. Let me give you an example from jurisprudence, as that might be easier for you to grasp. Let us say that the statement “every intoxicant is forbidden” is one pan, and “every wine is an intoxicant” is another. The conclusion is that wine is forbidden. The premises comprise three things: “wine,” “intoxicant,” and “forbidden.” “Wine” is present in only one of the premises, and so it is one pan. “Forbidden” is present only in the second premise, and so it is the second pan. “Intoxicant” is present in both premises, repeated in them and common to them, and so it is the beam. The two pans are suspended from it. One of them is attached to it as an object attached to its attribute, namely the statement “every wine is an intoxicant.” The other is attached to it as an attribute attached to its object, namely the statement “every intoxicant is forbidden.” Contemplate this until you grasp it. The corruption of this balance sometimes lies in the pan, other times in the beam, and other times in the attachment of pan to beam. I will give you a simple example of this when we examine the balance of Satan.

As for the balance that is more like a steelyard with one side much longer than the other, consider this example: “If the sale of an absent item were valid, it would become binding at the moment of agreement.” This is a long premise comprising two parts, one a consequence and the other an antecedent. The second premise

is, "Such a transaction does not become binding at the moment of agreement." This premise is shorter than the first, and so is more like the ball on the other side of the steelyard. In the Balance of Equilibrium, the pans are equal, neither one longer than the other, since each of them comprises no more than an attribute and object.

Understand all this in the light of what I told you before: the spiritual balance is not the same as the physical balance, but merely corresponds to it in a certain sense. It can also be compared to the birthing of the conclusion from the coupling of the two premises, because part of each of the two premises must enter into the other—in this case, the presence of "intoxicant" in both premises—so that the conclusion can be born. If nothing of either premise enters into the other, nothing can be born. For example, if you said, "every intoxicant is forbidden, and every usurped item must be reimbursed," no conclusion would be produced by these two premises, since no "mating" or "coupling" takes place between them, for no part of either enters the other. Conclusions are born from the common element that enters one premise from the other—and this is what we called the beam of the balance.

Once you understand how to see the parallels between the objects of sense and intellect, a tremendous door opens for you. When you step through this door, you become able to recognize the parallels between the visible material world and the unseen spiritual world. The latter contains great mysteries, and those who cannot see it are unable to borrow illumination from the lights of the Qur'ān or learn from it, nor can their knowledge be anything other than superficial. Just as the Qur'ān contains the balances for all knowledge, it also contains the keys to all knowledge, as I explained in my book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (The Jewels of the Qur'ān); so look for that there. The mystery of the parallel between the visible and invisible worlds is disclosed in dreams wherein spiritual truths are communicated through imaginal forms; for a

dream is a fraction of Prophethood. In the world of Prophethood itself, the material and spiritual worlds are fully disclosed.

For example, a man once had a dream in which he had a signet ring upon his finger, with which he was sealing the mouths and loins of men and women. He related this dream to Ibn Sirīn,ⁱ who asked, "Are you a muezzin who calls for the prayer before dawn in Ramadan?" He replied, "Indeed I am." Ask yourself why it was that this man's spiritual state disclosed itself to him from the invisible world in such a form. Seek the parallel between this form and the call to prayer before dawn in Ramadan. Perhaps on the Day of Resurrection, this muezzin will find a signet ring of fire upon his finger, and will be told, "That is the ring with which you used to seal the mouths and loins of men and women!" He will say, "By God, I never did that!" He will be told, "Yes, you did, though you knew it not! This is the spirit of your action."ⁱⁱ

The true meaning and spirit of things is only disclosed in the world of spirit; but the spirit is covered by form in the world of dissembling, the world of fantasy. *But now We have removed from you your covering, so today your sight is keen* (Qur'ān 50:22). This is how all those who neglect the bounds of the Sacred Law will be exposed. If you would like to see this expounded upon, consult the chapter "The Reality of Death" in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, where you will see wonders.

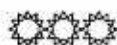
Contemplate this at length, and at least a window to the spiritual world may open for you through which to eavesdrop. I cannot imagine that the door itself will open for you, as long as you wait to receive knowledge of truths from an absent teacher whom you do not see; and if you did see him, you would discover that his

i The renowned sage and dream interpreter of Baṣra (d. 110/728).^{*}

ii By calling for the dawn prayer before dawn actually arrived, the muezzin caused people to abstain from eating and sexual relations for the Ramadan fast before it was strictly necessary for them to do so.

knowledge is far feebler than your own. Take it instead from one who has traveled, searched, and learned, for then you will have found an actual expert.

HE SAID: Now, that is another question that we could argue at length. It is true that I have not seen this absent teacher's face, but I have heard about him. I have never seen a lion either, but I have proof enough of its existence. Until her dying day, my mother always spoke very highly of him, as did our Master the lord of Alamūt Castle.ⁱ They even said that he is aware of everything that goes on in the world, even a thousand leagues away. Should I call my mother a liar, that virtuous and modest old lady? Or our Master, that great and righteous leader? Certainly not! They are truthful witnesses. How should it be otherwise, when their testimony is corroborated by all of my associates in Dāmghān and Iṣfahān,ⁱⁱ whose authority is recognized and obeyed by the people throughout the land? Do you think them all deceived, despite their intelligence? Or are they themselves deceivers, despite their piety? By no means! Beware of backbiting! Our Lord is aware of what transpires between us, without doubt, for *Not an atom's weight escapes Him in the heavens or in the earth* (Qur'ān 34:3). I fear that I will incur His wrath merely by giving ear to such talk. Turn the page on this foolish talk, and return to the subject of the balance. Tell me, what is the balance of Satan?



i Hasan al-Sabbāh, the founder of the Nizāri Ismā'īlī state (d. 518/1124), whose stronghold was Alamūt in the mountains of northern Iran.

ii Two cities in Iran, here cited perhaps to illustrate Imam Ghazālī's detailed knowledge of the Ismā'īlīs and their teachings. During his lifetime, the Ismā'īlīs held fortresses near Dāmghān and had a substantial presence and activity in Iṣfahān.



CHAPTER 7

THE BALANCE OF SATAN, AND HOW THE PROONENTS OF TA'LĪM WEIGH BY IT

I SAID: Very well, my poor fellow. Here is an explanation of the balance that your colleagues employ. I can see that you are still deluded by it. Know that for every balance of the Qur'ān that I have described, Satan has his own balance attached to it, which he disguises as the true balance so that people may employ it and fall into error. But Satan can only enter where there are gaps. If we close the gaps and seal them up, we will be safe from Satan. His gaps are to be found in ten places, which I compiled and explained in my books *Mihakk al-Nazar* (The Touchstone of Reason) and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* (The Standard of Knowledge), along with other subtle points regarding the requirements of the balance, which I will not touch on now because they will no doubt be beyond your level. If you would like an overview of them, consult the *Mihakk*, while the *Mi'yār* provides a more detailed explanation.

However, I will present a single example here: the occasion when Satan cast something into the mind of Abraham the Friend ﷺ. God Most High says, *And no Messenger or Prophet did We send before you without Satan insinuating something into his recitation as he recited; but then God effaces whatever Satan insinuates* (Qur'ān

22:52). This, of course, was when he turned in haste to the sun and said, *This is my Lord; this is greater* (Qur'ān 6:78). Because the sun was greater [than the star and the moon], Satan tried to deceive him with it.

The summary of this deceptive weighing is as follows: "God is the greatest" is one premise, known by consensus; "the sun is the greatest of the celestial bodies" is another, known by sense-perception; and "therefore the sun is a god" is the conclusion. This is a balance that Satan attached to the Lesser Balance of Equilibrium, because "greatest" is an attribute of God and also of the sun, which suggests that each can be described by the other. This, however, is the opposite of the Lesser Balance, for the principle of that balance is that two things be present in one thing, not that one thing be present in two. If two things are present in one thing, it means that part of one of them can be described by the other, as we have seen. But if one thing is present in two things, it does not follow that either thing can be described by the other. Observe how Satan disguises a thing as its opposite.

The analogy of this false balance to the patently false standard-weight can be illustrated by the example of color. Color is present in both black and white, but that does not mean that white can be described as black or vice versa. If someone said, "White is a color, and black is a color; therefore black is white," this would obviously be fallacious and wrong. Likewise, saying, "God is greatest, and the sun is greatest, therefore the sun is a god" is manifestly wrong, for it is possible for two contrasting things to share a given attribute. The fact that two things share an attribute does not mean that there is any connection between them; but if one thing shares two attributes, there must be a connection between the two attributes. Dimwitted people do not grasp the difference between one thing having two attributes, and two things sharing one attribute.

HE SAID: This fallacy is clear to me. But when do the proponents of *Ta'lim* employ it to weigh their words?

I SAID: They employ it so often that I could not possibly have time to relate them all, but I will give you one example. I have often heard them say, "Truth lies with unity, and falsehood lies with multiplicity. The way of reasoned opinion leads to multiplicity, while the way of *Ta'lim* leads to unity. Therefore the truth must lie with the way of *Ta'lim*."

HE SAID: Yes, I have heard this often, and I believe it myself, for I deem it to be unanswerably true and beyond doubt.

I SAID: Yet it is the balance of Satan! See how your colleagues have stumbled into employing the logic balance of Satan to refute the balance of Abraham  and all the other balances!

HE SAID: How so?

I SAID: Satan obfuscates the balances with much talk and muddled terms, so that one cannot spot where his deception lies. Yet all of this talk amounts to the following: "The truth is characterized by unity" is one premise; "The way of *Ta'lim* is characterized by unity" is another; and the conclusion is: "The way of *Ta'lim* must be true. Unity is an attribute by which two things are characterized, which means that each of them must be characterized by the other." This is exactly like saying, "Color is an attribute by which both black and white are characterized, which means that black must be white." It is also like Satan's own claim that "Greatness is an attribute by which God and the sun are characterized, and therefore the sun must be God." There is no difference between these balances—color is common to black and white, greatness is common to God and the sun, and unity is common to *Ta'lim* and the truth. Reflect on this, and you will understand.

HE SAID: I understand this perfectly, but I will not be convinced by a single example. Give me another balance that my colleagues

employ, so that my heart may be more sure that they have been duped by Satan's balance.

I SAID: You have no doubt heard them say, "The truth must be known either by pure reasoned opinion or by pure infallible teaching (*Ta'lim*). If one of these is refuted, the other must be proven. Yet it cannot be apprehended by intellectual reasoning alone, for different minds and schools of thought are contradictory. This proves that it can only be known by infallible teaching."

HE SAID: Yes, by God, I have often heard this. It is the key to their entire mission, their fundamental argument.

I SAID: Yet it is weighed by the balance of Satan, the one that he attaches to the Balance of Contradiction. In order for it to be true that the negation of one category affirms the other, the categorization must be exclusive, not inclusive; but Satan disguises the inclusive as exclusive. In this argument it is inclusive, because it is not limited to negation and affirmation alone, but rather there is a third category, namely for the truth to be apprehended by both reasoned opinion and infallible teaching.

The analogy of this to the false standard-weight is for a person to say, "Colors cannot be perceived by the eye, but only by sunlight." If we ask why this is, he replies, "It must be that either they are perceived by the eye, or by sunlight. It cannot be by the eye, since they are not visible at night. This proves that they are perceived by sunlight." The rebuttal of this is to say, "My poor fellow! There is a third category, which is that they are perceived by the eye, but in the presence of sunlight."

HE SAID: I would like you to elaborate on the error in the first example, the one about truth and unity. It is quite difficult to spot the exact point at which the error occurs.

I SAID: The nature of the error is as I described, namely the confusion between a single thing being characterized by two attributes, and two things being characterized by one attribute. The root of

the error is a false inversion. A person who knows that every truth is one might make the mistake of thinking that everything that is one is true, but this reverse conclusion does not necessarily follow at all. The actual reverse conclusion that follows is that *some* things that are one are true. To say that all humans are animals does not imply a universal inversion, namely that all animals are human. What it actually implies is that *some* animals are human.

Satan has no greater success in deceiving weak minds than in suggesting these universal inversions, even when it comes to the objects of the senses. A man sees a black striped rope and recoils from it, thinking it to be a snake. That is because he knows that every snake is long and striped, and he prejudges in his imagination that the universal inverse of this must be true, and so he takes every long and striped object to be a snake. What he ought to do is affirm the particular inverse, which is that some long and striped objects are snakes, but not all. There are many fine points pertaining to inversions and contradictions which you will only understand by consulting *Mihakk al-Nazar* and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*.

HE SAID: With each example you give, I gain greater confidence in recognizing the balances of Satan. Do not be so miserly as to deny me another!

I SAID: Sometimes the gaps in the balance are caused by structural faults, such that the pans are not properly suspended from the beam. Sometimes the fault is in the pan itself, due to its having been made from faulty materials. It must be made of iron, copper, or leather. If it is made of ice or cotton, it cannot be used for weighing. A sword may be faulty because of its shape, such as if it is made cylindrical instead of flat and sharp; or the fault may lie in the materials used to make it, such as if it is made of wood or clay.

The same is true of the balances of Satan. Sometimes the corruption lies in the structure itself, such as the examples I gave of the sun's greatness or the truth's unity, where the form is faulty

and inverted, as if a person were to set the pans down on top of the beam and try to weigh with them. Sometimes the material itself is corrupt, such as the claim of Iblis: *I am better than him. You created me from fire, and him from clay*, in reply to God Most High's Words: *What keeps you from prostrating before what I have created with My own Hands?* (Qur'ān 38:75-76). In the above words Iblis incorporated two balances: he justified his refusal to prostrate on the grounds that he was superior, and then affirmed that his superiority lay in his having been created from fire. Had he stated all the parts of his argument plainly, it would have been evident that his balance was soundly composed but made of faulty materials.

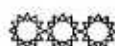
The full form of his argument was as follows: "I am better than him; the better does not prostrate; therefore I shall not prostrate." Neither of these premises can be admitted, for they are not patently obvious. Obscure claims must be weighed by patent facts, and his claim was neither patent nor admitted. We would say, "We do not admit that you are better," which denies the first premise. Then we would deny the second by saying, "Nor do we admit that the better is not obliged to prostrate, for obligation and entitlement are determined by command, not by merit." But Iblis did not attempt to argue for his second premise, namely that obligation is by merit, not by command; he concentrated on arguing that "I am better because I was created from fire." This is an appeal to superiority based on origin. The full form of his argument and balance was as follows: "The one whose origin is better is better; my origin is better; therefore I am better." The pans of this scale are faulty too, for we do not admit that "The one whose origin is better is better," because merit pertains to the attributes of the individual, not his origin. Iron might be better than glass, yet something crafted from glass could be better than something crafted from iron, if it is well made. Likewise, we can say that Abraham ؑ was better

than the son of Noah ﷺ, though Abraham was created from his father Āzar who was an unbeliever, while Noah's son was created from a Prophet.

As for his second premise, "I am created from a better origin because fire is better than clay," we do not admit this either; clay is made of water and earth, and one could argue that their mixture brings about the subsistence of animals and plants and causes growth and generation, while fire only destroys and corrupts everything. Therefore his claim that fire is better is spurious.

These balances, then, are correctly constructed, but their material is faulty, like a sword made of wood—or *like a mirage in the desert that the thirsty man takes to be water, until he comes to it and finds it to be nothing; but he finds God there, and He pays him his account in full* (Qur'ān 24:39). That is how the proponents of *Ta'lim* will find themselves on the Day of Resurrection, when the true nature of their balances is revealed to them. It is also one of the entry-points that Satan uses, which must be closed off.

The proper material to be used for constructing speculative thought is any premise that is known for certain to be true, whether by sense, experience, mass transmission, primary intuition, or deduction from any of these. When it comes to argument and debate, the premise may be constructed from anything which the interlocutor acknowledges and admits, even if it is not itself known to be factual—because it is still an argument against him. Some of the arguments in the Qur'ān are of this nature, which is why you must not reject the arguments of the Qur'ān even when you have cause to doubt in their premises, since these arguments were leveled against groups who admitted them.





CHAPTER 8

MUḤAMMAD  AND THE LEARNED OF HIS COMMUNITY SUFFICE IN PLACE OF ANY "INFALLIBLE IMAM", AND THE TRUTHFULNESS OF MUḤAMMAD  CAN BE KNOWN BY THE METHOD OF THE KNOWERS OF GOD, WHICH IS CLEARER AND MORE EVIDENT THAN THE CONSIDERATION OF MIRACLES

HE SAID: The cure has been effected, and the veil lifted. You have truly performed a marvel. But you have built a mansion and destroyed a city, for I had been hoping that I would learn from you how to weigh with the balance, so that thanks to you and the Qur'ān I would no longer need the infallible Imam. Yet now that you have brought up these subtle points about the gaps through which error may slip in, I have lost hope of becoming independent. I cannot be sure of avoiding error, even if I do employ the balance. I can now see why people splinter into different schools of thought: they are not aware of these subtle flaws as you are, and so some have gone astray while others have gone aright. The best approach for me is to rely on the Imam, so that I may avoid these subtle flaws.

I SAID: Poor fool! Your knowledge of the truthful imam is not axiomatic, which means either that it is based on blind conformity to your parents, or that it has been weighed in one of these balances. If a fact is not axiomatic, the one who believes it must have obtained it by employing one of these balances in his own mind, even if he is unaware of it. You are aware in your own mind that the balance of appraisal through the systematic arrangement of premises, empirical or sensorial, is sound. So are all other people, even if they do not realize it. Anyone who understands "this animal cannot be pregnant because it is a mule," for example, understands the systematic arrangement of premises, even if he does not know the origin of this knowledge. The same is true of any other piece of knowledge in the world that a person can acquire.

If you took your belief in the infallibility of the truthful Imam, or indeed that of Muḥammad ﷺ, from your parents and associates by conformity, you are no different than the Jews or Zoroastrians, for they do the same. If you took it from any of these balances, you may have slipped into one of their subtle errors, and so you must not trust it.

HE SAID: You are right—but what path am I to follow, since you have barred the paths of infallible teaching and the balance too?

I SAID: Far from it! Consult the Qur'ān, for it teaches you the way when it says, *When a touch from Satan visits those who are Godfearing, they recollect, and thereupon they see clearly* (Qur'ān 7:201). It does not say, "They travel, and thereupon they see clearly." You know that there are a great many things to be known; and if you were to travel all the way to the Imam whom you hold to be infallible every time an issue arose, you would toil much and learn little. The right way is to learn from me how to employ the balance and meet its requirements. Then if something troubles you, weigh it in the balance and remember its requirements by clear thinking and thorough effort, and thereupon you will see clearly.

This is no different from the way you calculate what you owe the grocer or he owes you, or settle a question about estate division, being in doubt as to whether you are right or wrong. You do not make the long journey to the "infallible Imam" every time; you judge according to the science of mathematics, which you recall and repeat over and over again until you are certain that you have not made any errors, even in the tiniest of details. Anyone familiar with mathematics realizes this. Likewise, one who knows the balance as well as I do will recall, contemplate, and repeat it over and over again until finally he reaches certain, necessary knowledge that he is not mistaken. If you do not follow this path you will have no success. You will continue to doubt because of "perhaps" and "maybe." Perhaps you are mistaken in conforming to your Imam, or even to the Prophet in whom you believe! For your knowledge of his truthfulness is not axiomatic.

HE SAID: You have helped me to see that infallible teaching is real, but that the Imam is the Prophet ﷺ. I acknowledge that not everyone can take knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ without knowing the balance, and that complete knowledge of the balance can only be obtained from you. It seems that you claim to be the Imam yourself! What is your proof, and your miracle? My Imam must either perform a miracle or provide authorization handed down from his forefathers to himself. Where is your authorization, or your miracle?

I SAID: Your assertion that I must be claiming to be the Imam myself is not correct. I allow that anyone could share this knowledge with me, and it could be learned from him just as well as from me. I do not claim that this teaching is my preserve alone.

Furthermore, when you say "you claim the imamate for yourself," the fact is that "the Imam" can mean the one who learns from God by the mediation of Gabriel, which I do not claim for myself. But it can also mean the one who learns from God and from Gabriel by

the mediation of the Messenger. It is in this sense that we call 'Alī an Imam, for he learned from the Messenger, not from Gabriel. In that sense, I do claim imamate for myself. What is my proof? My proof is plainer than any authorization, or anything that you might call a miracle.

Suppose that three people tell you that they have memorized the Qur'ān. You ask them for proof. One of them says, "I have an authorization from al-Kisā'i,ⁱ the master reciter, because he authorized my teacher's teacher, and my teacher authorized me, so it is as though al-Kisā'i himself authorized me." The second man says, "My proof is that I can transform this staff into a snake," and then he performs that feat. The third man says, "My proof is that I can recite the entire Qur'ān to you without consulting the written text," and then he does so. Upon my word—which of these proofs is clearest, and which is your heart most willing to trust?

HE SAID: The one who recites the Qur'ān. That is the best possible proof, for it leaves me no room to doubt. As for claim of authorization from a teacher who received authorization from al-Kisā'i, it is conceivable that errors may have occurred somewhere, especially when the chain of transmission is very long. As for the transformation of the staff into a snake, it may be that deception and illusion were employed; and even if they were not, the most that can be said of it is that it is an astounding feat. Why should it follow that a person who can perform an astounding feat must have memorized the Qur'ān?

I SAID: Likewise, my proof is that just as I have known these balances and made them known and understandable to you, dispelling any doubt from your heart about them, you are obliged to believe in my imamate. It is like how you learned arithmetic from a teacher. When he taught you it, you gained knowledge of

i A renowned grammarian and narrator of the Qur'ān (d. 189/804).

arithmetic, and also the consequent knowledge that your teacher is himself an arithmetician well-versed in this science. From his teaching, you learned of his knowledge and the truthfulness of his claim to be an arithmetician.

In the same way, I believe in the truthfulness of Muḥammad ﷺ and Moses ﷺ, not because of the feats of cleaving the moon or transforming a staff into a snake; for such things are subject to much ambiguity, and might not be trusted. Indeed, someone who believes in the transformation of the staff into a snake may at the same time deny the lowing of the Calf that the Samaritan blasphemously claimed.¹ There are a great many contradictions in the visible world of sense-perception. However, I learned the balances from the Qur'ān, and then weighed all divine knowledge in those balances, even eschatological matters such as the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the obedient. As I stated in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, I found that all of this agreed with what the Qur'ān and the Tradition say on the matter. I therefore became certain that Muḥammad ﷺ was truthful and that the Qur'ān is true. I did as 'Alī ؑ said: "Do not know the truth by men, but know the truth, and then you will know its people."

My knowledge of the truthfulness of the Prophet was therefore necessary. If you see a stranger debating matters of jurisprudence and displaying his evidently sound knowledge of the subject, you will not doubt that he is a jurist. Your certainty of this will be greater than it would have been had he transformed a thousand staffs into snakes to prove it, because in that case it would have been reasonable to suspect sorcery, illusion, shamanism, or some other explanation. The belief that this produced, once you had dismissed such doubts, would have been weak. This is the faith of the masses and the theologians. As for the faith of the masters

of spiritual witnessing who see through the niche of Lordship,ⁱ it is of an entirely different order.

HE SAID: I too desire to know the Prophet as you know him. You said that this can only be known by weighing all divine knowledge in these balances, yet it is not clear to me how all religious matters could be weighed in them. How can I ascertain this?

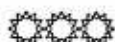
I SAID: Not so! I do not claim that I weigh religious matters alone in these balances. On the contrary, I also use them to weigh matters of arithmetic, geometry, medicine, law, and theology. With any kind of knowledge that is real, and not merely conventional, I can use these balances to tell its truth from its falsehood. How should it be otherwise, when it is the Just Balance, the scale that is set alongside the Book and the Qur'ān in God's words: *Indeed We sent Our Messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance* (Qur'ān 57:25)? But you cannot ascertain my ability to do this by means of authorization, nor the transformation of a staff into a snake, but only by discovering it through experience and experiment. When a man claims to be a horseman, one cannot know he is telling the truth until he mounts a horse and goes galloping off. Ask me what you will about religious matters, and I will disclose the truth about them to you one by one, weighing them in these balances, until you attain necessary knowledge that this weighing is accurate and the knowledge it produces is certain. He who has never tried does not know.

HE SAID: Can you not, then, teach all of mankind about the truth of every religious issue, so that all the disputes among them are settled once and for all?

I SAID: Certainly not! I do not have that power. You say it as if your own infallible Imam had settled all the disputes among mankind, and banished all doubts from their hearts! When did even the

i The author expands on this in his treatise *Mishkāṭ al-anwār* (Niche of Lights).

Prophets ﷺ settle all disputes? When was it in their power to do so? The fact is that it has always been necessary for mankind to differ: *Had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind one community; but they will continue to differ, save those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for that did He create them* (Qur'ān 11:118-119). Will I claim that I can turn back the decree of God, which He determined before time began? Can your Imam claim the same? If he can, why does he go on delaying, while the world brims with conflict? And tell me: was the Chief of the Community 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib the cause for the abolishment of conflict among mankind, or the cause for the founding of conflicts that will never end?





CHAPTER 9

HUMANITY'S PATH TO DELIVERANCE FROM THE DARKNESS OF DISAGREEMENT

HE SAID: How is humanity to be delivered from these disagreements?

I SAID: If they listened to me, all of their disagreements would be settled by the Book of God Most High. But there is no way to make them listen. They did not all listen to the Prophets, nor to your Imam, so why would they listen to me? How could they all come together to listen, when it was decreed before time began that *they will continue to differ ... and for that did He create them* (Qur'ān 11:118–119)? It is necessary that they differ, as you will know from my book *Jawāb miṣāl al-khilāf* (Settling the Dispute), which contains twelve chapters.ⁱ

HE SAID: If they did listen, what would you do?

I SAID: I would engage with them with the help of a single verse from the Book of God Most High: His Words, *Indeed We sent Our Messengers with clear signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, that mankind might uphold justice. And We sent down iron, wherein are awesome power and many uses for mankind, and that God might know who would help Him and His*

i This is one of al-Ghazālī's lost works.

Messengers unseen. Truly God is Strong, Mighty (Qur'ān 57:25). The reason He sent down these three is that people are of three kinds, and each of them—the Book, iron, and the Balance—is a treatment for one kind of people.

HE SAID: Who are they, and what is their treatment?

I SAID: The three kinds of people are the ordinary [believers], who are the saved ones, the simple people, the people of Paradise; then the elite, who are the people of inner vision and particular intelligence; and then between them is formed another group, the people of contention and argument, who *follow the ambiguous part of the Book, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation* (Qur'ān 3:7).

My treatment for the elite would be to teach them the balances of justice and how to weigh with them, which would quickly settle their disagreements. These are people in whom there are three common traits. The first is insightful disposition and powerful intelligence, which is an innate gift, a natural talent that cannot be acquired. The second is inner freedom from blind conformity and zealous adherence to any school of thought that is inherited or taught; for the blind conformist does not listen, and the dullard would not understand if he did. The third is that they believe that I am one of those who possess insight into the balance; for guidance comes only after faith. If a person does not believe that you know arithmetic, he cannot learn from you.

The second kind of people are all the simple folk, the masses. They are the ones who do not have the capacity to understand such truths, or those who possess the innate capacity but lack the inclination to seek them, since their sole concern is craft and work. They have no affinity for argument, and they feel no need to wade into matters they cannot understand, as the pretentious do. Such people do not disagree, but only choose their leaders from among those who do. I would call them to God with good

counsel, as I would call the people of inner vision with wisdom, and the argumentative people with disputation. God sums up these three in one verse, which I recited to you earlier: *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel, and dispute with them in the manner that is best* (Qur'ān 16:125).

I would say to them what the Messenger of God ﷺ said to a Bedouin who came to him and said, "Teach me a rare gem of knowledge." The Messenger of God ﷺ recognized that he was not suited for that, so he said, "And what have you done with the fundamentals of knowledge?"—meaning faith, God-consciousness, and preparation for the Hereafter. "Go and make good on the fundamentals of knowledge; then return to me, and I will teach you the rare gems."

I would tell the common man, "Delving into contentious matters of dispute is not your business, so step back. Beware of delving into them, or even listening to them, lest you come to ruin. If you spent your life in the craft of smithing, you would not be a weaver. You have spent your life engaged in other pursuits than knowledge, so why should you be suited to delving into it? Beware, and beware again, of destroying yourself!" Any major sin would be better for the common man than delving into knowledge and slipping into unbelief without realizing it.

He might say, "But I must have a religion to believe in and practice if I am to be forgiven. People disagree about religions, so which one would you have me choose?" I would reply, "Religion has roots and branches, and it is in them that the disagreements lie. For the roots, you need believe nothing other than what is in the Qur'ān, for God Most High has not hidden His Names and Attributes from His servants. You must believe that there is no god but God, and that God is Living, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Almighty, Magnificent, and Holy, and that there is nothing like Him; and all the other things that the Qur'ān

describes and the Community affirms by consensus. That is enough to make your religion sound. If anything should confuse you, say: *We believe in it; all is from our Lord* (Qur'ān 3:7). Believe in all that has been related about the affirmation and negation of attributes, and hold them in the greatest reverence and veneration, all while denying any resemblance [of Him to His creations] and affirming that *Nothing is like unto Him* (Qur'ān 42:11). Beyond this, pay no regard to talk of this or that. You are not commanded to engage in it, nor is it within your power."

He might begin to speak pretentiously and say, "I know from the Qur'ān that God is knowing, but I do not know whether His knowledge is essential or extraneous to His Essence. The Ash'aris and Mu'tazilis disagree about this." This would show that he is outside the bounds of the masses, for the common man does not care about such matters unless the demon of contention rouses him. As the Tradition goes, "God ruins people only by making them argumentative" (Tirmidhī 3253). Such a person would therefore be grouped among the disputants, whose treatment I will describe presently.

This is the advice I would offer the common man regarding the roots of religion: refer to the Book of God. God sent down the Book, the Balance, and iron, and these are the people who should be directed to the Book. As for the branches, I would tell him: "Do not concern your heart with issues of contention until you have mastered those issues that are agreed upon. The Community agrees that the provision of the Hereafter is God-consciousness and piety; that ill-gotten gains, unlawful property, backbiting, tale-bearing, adultery, theft, treachery, and other such things are forbidden; and that all duties are obligatory. Once you are done with all that, I will teach you about matters of dispute. If he asks this of me before he is finished with all of that, it will be clear that he is a disputant, not a commoner—for when does

the common man finish with all these things, such that he could move on to disputes? Have you observed your colleagues to have finished with all this, and only then been seized by the desire to dispute? Certainly not! In their misguidedness, their weak minds resemble the mind of a sick man at death's door who is offered a cure whose efficacy is acknowledged by all physicians, yet says to them, "Physicians disagree about a certain medicine, and whether it is hot or cold. I might have need of that medicine one day. I will not accept treatment until I find someone who can teach me how to settle the dispute about it."

Certainly, if I were to encounter a righteous man who had accomplished all the prescriptions of God-consciousness, and he said, "I am confused about several matters. I do not know if I should perform ritual ablutions after contact, touching, vomiting, or a nosebleed; or whether I should form the intention to fast in Ramadan during the night or the day," and so on, I would tell him, "If you wish to be as safe as possible upon the path to the Hereafter, follow the way of greater caution and do whatever all agree upon. Perform ablutions for everything about which there is disagreement; for even if some do not say certain things are obligatory, they at least recommend them. Make the intention for Ramadan at night, since even those who do not deem it obligatory it recommend it."

He might say, "The way of greater caution is difficult to apply when matters arise that are simply a question of yes or no. I do not know whether to read the *qunūt* supplicationⁱ in the dawn prayer or not, or whether to recite the *Basmala*ⁱⁱ out loud or not." I would reply, "For these you must exercise your independent judgment

i A special formula of supplication recommended during the canonical prayer by some schools of law.

ii In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful, which some schools recommend be recited out loud in the prayer when commencing recitation of the *Fātiha*; the difference centers on whether or not it is considered a verse of the *sūra*.

(*ijtihād*), and decide which of the imams you would rather follow, and which of them your heart feels is correct. If you fell ill and there were several physicians in town, you would select one to consult based on your reasoned opinion, not on mere whim. This approach will suit you here, too. Whoever of them you feel is best, follow him. If what he said is correct in God's sight, both you and he will receive two rewards. If he was wrong, both you and he will receive one reward."

This is just what the Prophet ﷺ enjoined when he said, "The one who exercises independent judgment and is right will have two rewards, and the one who exercises independent judgment and is wrong will have one reward" (Bukhārī 7352). God also refers us to the people of independent judgment, saying: *Those of them whose task it is to investigate the matter would have known it* (Qur'ān 4:83). The Prophet also approved of qualified people exercising independent judgment when he asked Mu'ādh,ⁱ "How will you judge?" He replied, "By the Book of God." He said, "And if you do not find it?" He replied, "By the Sunna of the Messenger of God." He said, "And if you do not find it?" He replied, "I will exercise my independent judgment." Note that Mu'ādh said this even before the Prophet had told him or permitted him to do so, yet he ﷺ replied, "Praise be to God, who has guided the messenger of the Messenger of God to what pleases the Messenger of God!" (Abū Dāwūd 3592). This implies that the Messenger of God ﷺ approves of anyone who does so, whether Mu'ādh or otherwise. This is the true in the same way as it is that when the Prophet ﷺ told the Bedouin man to free a slave to expiate his violation of

i Mu'ādh ibn Jabal ؓ, the Companion who was sent to Yemen as governor and to teach Islam (d. 18/639).

the Ramadan fast, it implied that a Turk or an Indian should do the same in the same situation.ⁱ

This is because mankind are not obliged to do what is actually right in the eyes of God. That would be impossible, and God does not command the impossible. Rather, they are obliged to do what they *believe* is right. They are not obliged to pray wearing garments that are ritually pure, but only those they *believe* to be ritually pure. If one later realizes that in fact one's garment was not ritually pure, one is not obligated to repeat the prayer. We know this because once as the Messenger of God ﷺ was praying, Gabriel came to him and told him that there was something impure on his sandal, and he simply removed the sandal without stopping the prayer or repeating it from the start. Nor is a traveler obliged to pray towards the actual direction of the Qibla, but only towards where he believes it to be based on reference to landmarks or the stars and sun. If he is correct, he will have two rewards; if not, he will have one. Nor is it necessary to deliver the zakat to those who are definitely poor, but only to those one believes to be poor, since the truth of the matter is obscure. When ruling on cases of murder or rape, the judge does not have to find witnesses he knows to be truthful, but only ones he believes to be truthful. If capital punishment may be applied based on a belief which might be mistaken, namely the belief that the witnesses are truthful, why should it not be permitted to judge according to evidence-based belief when exercising independent judgment?

I would very much like to know what your colleagues say about this. Do they say that if a person is uncertain about the Qibla he should postpone his prayer and travel to the Imam to ask him about it? Would he tell him that he has to be exactly correct, even

i That is, the Prophet's ﷺ statements to individuals have a universal application unless it is explicitly stated otherwise.

though that is beyond his capacity? Or would he tell him to exercise independent judgment and follow that, even if he does not have the capacity to exercise it because he does not know how to determine the Qibla using the guidance of the stars, landmarks, and wind?

HE SAID: I do not doubt that he would permit him to exercise independent judgment. Nor would he accuse him of sin if he exercised it to the best of his abilities but made a mistake and prayed facing away from the Qibla.

I SAID: But if a person could pray with his back to the Qibla and be excused and rewarded for it, it does not seem unreasonable that he be excused for errors in other matters of independent judgment. Those who exercise it and those who follow their judgment are all excused. Some of them actually hit upon what is correct in God's sight, while others share in one of their two rewards. Their positions are not so very different, and there is no cause for them to squabble and form rival cliques—especially given that they cannot know for certain which of them is correct, though every one of them thinks that he is. If two travelers exercise independent judgment to find the Qibla and disagree, each of them has the right to pray towards the direction he deems correct, and the duty to refrain from condemning and criticizing the other. Each is obliged to follow his best guess; as for praying toward the actual Qibla as God knows it to be, that is beyond their capacity. In Yemen when Mu'adh exercised his judgment, he did not do so in the belief that it was inconceivable for him to make a mistake, but rather in the belief that he would be excused if he did.

The reason for this is that in circumstantial matters of law in which it is conceivable that religious laws may differ, it is sometimes the case that two opposing things both seem to offer good prospects for salvation, and yet a choice must be made between them. But there is no disagreement regarding those matters wherein religious laws do not differ. The true nature of this disagreement

can be known by contemplating the mysteries of following the Sunna, which I discussed in the section on the tenth principle of outward action in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*.

As for the third kind of people, the disputants, I would call them to the truth gently, by which I mean I would not be fanatical or aggressive, but instead show them kindness and *dispute with them in the manner that is best* (Qur'ān 16:125), as God Most High commanded His Messenger. The meaning of "disputing in the manner that is best" is basing oneself on the principles that the disputant admits, and then arguing the truth from them by employing the true balance in the manner I describe in my book *al-Iqtisād fil-i'tiqād* (The Middle Way in Doctrine), and to that extent. If that did not convince him because of his instinctive desire to know more, I would elevate him further by teaching him the balances. If it did not convince him because of his stupidity and insistence on persevering with his fanaticism and stubbornness, I would treat him with iron. For God Most High associated iron and the balance with the Book, implying that humanity cannot collectively uphold justice without these three. The Book is for the masses, the balance is for the elite, and iron, *wherein is awesome power*, is for those who *follow the ambiguous part of the Book, seeking discord and seeking its interpretation*. They do not realize that this is none of their concern, for *none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge* (Qur'ān 3:7), to the exclusion of the disputants.

By "disputants" I mean people whose cleverness surpasses that of the masses but is still deficient; or those whose cleverness was perfect in their innate disposition, but who harbor within themselves rancor, stubbornness, fanaticism, and conformity, which prevents them from apprehending the truth. These attributes are *veils upon their hearts so that they understand not* (Qur'ān 6:25). Their imperfect cleverness is their undoing; a faulty disposition and

imperfect cleverness is much worse than stupidity. A Tradition says that most of the inhabitants of Paradise will be simple-minded,ⁱ while 'Ilīyyūnⁱ will be for the people of true intelligence. Excluded from both categories are those who dispute about the Signs of God; they are the denizens of Hell. God curbs through the power of the ruler what He does not curb through the Qur'ān. Such people ought to be prevented from engaging in dispute by the sword and the lance, as 'Umar did when a man asked him about two ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān, and he responded by striking him with his whip. Or consider how Mālik,ⁱⁱ when asked about God's settling upon the Throne, replied, "The settling is a true reality, belief in it is obligatory, its 'how' is unknown, and to ask about it is heretical innovation." In saying this he closed the door upon disputation, as did all the early Muslims. Opening the door to it caused great harm to God's servants.

This, then, is my way of calling people to the truth and bringing them out of the darkness of error into the light of truth. I call the elite with wisdom by teaching the balance; and when someone learns the correct balance, he gains the aptitude for not just one branch of knowledge, but many, for with the aid of the balance he may ascertain the quantities of substances without limit. Likewise, one who has the Just Balance has in his possession wisdom, and whoever is given it has been given not just a single good, but *much good* (Qur'ān 2:269) without limit. If the Qur'ān did not contain the balances, it would not be right to call the Qur'ān "light," for light is that which is visible itself and also makes other things visible, which is exactly what the Balance is. Nor would His Words be true, *There is not a grain in the shadows of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry, but that it is in a manifest Book* (Qur'ān 6:59), since all

i One of the highest places in Paradise: see Q. 83:18-20.

ii Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), founder of the Māliki school, one of the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence.

aspects of knowledge are not contained in the Qur'ān literally, but only potentially, in that it contains the balances of justice which open all the limitless doors to wisdom. This is how I call the elite; I call the masses with good counsel by referring them to the Book and limiting myself to what it says about the Attributes of God Most High; and I call the disputants by disputing in the manner that is best. If they reject these approaches then I decline to engage with them any further, and I leave it to the power of the ruler to protect others from their evil by means of iron, which was sent down alongside the balance.

I would like to know now, my friend, how your Imam deals with these three types of people. Does he teach the masses and burden them with things they cannot understand, thereby contravening the way of the Messenger ﷺ? Or does he remove disputation from the disputants' brains by means of convincing arguments, though even the Messenger ﷺ himself could not do so, despite the many arguments God provides in the Qur'ān against the unbelievers? How powerful your Imam must be, since he is more powerful than God and His Messenger! Or does he call the people of inner vision to blindly conform to him, though they would not even blindly accept what the Messenger says, nor be convinced by the transformation of a staff into a snake? In fact they would say, "That is certainly an impressive feat, but why should it prove that the one who does it is truthful? After all, the world is replete with feats of sorcery and spell-casting that astound the mind, and no one could tell miracles from sorcery but one who is familiar with all of them in all their varieties, so as to identify the miracle as being outside their sphere. That is how the sorcerers recognized Moses, for they were masters of sorcery. But who has the power to do this?" On the contrary, they desire to know a person's truthfulness by what he says, just as the student of arithmetic knows from the arithmetic itself that his teacher can rightfully claim to be an arithmetician.

This is the certain knowledge that convinces the truly intelligent and the people of inner vision, and nothing else will convince them. If they recognize the truthfulness of the Messenger and the Qur'ān by this method, and understand the balances of the Qur'ān as I presented them to you, and take from it the keys to all branches of knowledge along with the balances as I explained in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, why should they need your Imam, and what could they learn from him? I would very much like to know what you have learned until now from your infallible Imam, what problems of the religion he has solved, and what obscure matters he has unveiled! God Most High says, *This is God's creation; now show me what those besides Him have created!* (Qur'ān 31:11).

Now you have heard my way of weighing knowledge in the balances. Show me what obscure points of knowledge you have learned from your Imam until now, and what others teach from him. The purpose of inviting someone to a meal is not merely to invite them without actually eating. I see you all inviting people to your Imam, but then I see that anyone who accepts the invitation remains just as ignorant as he was before. The Imam does not solve his problems, and indeed he may give him new ones. His acceptance of the invitation does not give him any knowledge, but may simply add to his transgression and ignorance.

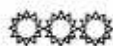
HE SAID: I have spent much time with my fellows, but all I have learned from them is that they say, "You must follow the way of infallible teaching and beware of reasoned opinion and analogy, for they are contradictory."

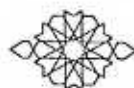
I SAID: How strange it is to call people to teaching but then not engage in it! Tell them, "You called me to teaching, and I accepted. Now teach me what you have."

HE SAID: I do not think they have anything more to offer.

I SAID: Well then, I too hold to infallible teaching and the Imam, and repudiate reasoned opinion and analogy. But I can offer you

more, if you are able to shed your blind conformity. I can teach you the mysteries of knowledge and the secrets of the Qur'ān, deriving from it the keys to all branches of knowledge, just as I derived from it their balances. I have explained in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* how all knowledge branches from it. But I do not call people to any other imam but Muḥammad ﷺ, nor to any other book but the Qur'ān, from which I derive all the secrets of knowledge. My proof for this is my words and arguments. If you doubt, you must test me and try me. Do you think it better to learn from me, or from your fellows?





CHAPTER 10

THE FORMATION OF REASONED OPINION AND ANALOGY, AND THE DEMONSTRATION OF THEIR FALSEHOOD

HE SAID: As for breaking with my fellows and learning from you, I may be prevented from doing so by my mother's final counsel to me as she lay dying, as I mentioned to you earlier. But I would still like you to reveal to me how reasoned opinion and analogy can be corrupted. I suspect that you have a low opinion of my intelligence, and that you have been dissembling to me by presenting reasoned opinion and analogy in the guise of a "balance," and then reciting passages of the Qur'ān in support of this, when in fact it is nothing other than the [science of] analogy that your fellows proclaim.

I SAID: Not at all! I will explain to you what I mean and what they mean by reasoned opinion and analogy. Reasoned opinion is, for instance, how the Mu'tazila say, "God Most High is obliged to do what is best for His creatures." If they are asked to justify this, they can do no more than say that it is an opinion which they approve with their minds, based on an analogy between Creator and creation and likening His wisdom to theirs. Things approved by the [unguided] mind are the reasoned opinion that I do not deem reliable, for it results in conclusions that the balances of the

Qur'ān would judge fallacious. This opinion is one such, for if I were to weigh it in the Balance of Consequence, I would say: "If doing what is best for creation were obligatory for God, He would have done it; but it is a fact that He has not done it; therefore it follows that it cannot be obligatory, for He could not fail to meet an obligation." They might retort, "We admit that if it were obligatory, He would have done it; but we do not admit that He has not done it." I would respond, "If He had done what was best for them, He would have created them in Paradise and left them there, since that would be best for them. It is a fact that He did not do so, which means that He has not done what is in their best interest." This conclusion is also produced by the Balance of Consequence.

Our interlocutor would be forced either to deny this and claim that [God] did indeed leave them in Paradise, which is patently false, or else to argue that it was better for them to be expelled into the lower world, the abode of trial, and to be made susceptible to sin. Then on the Day when all secrets are exposed, [God] will say to Adam, "Adam, bring out the denizens of Hell!" "How many?" he will ask. He will reply, "Nine hundred and ninety-nine from every thousand," as an authentic hadith describes (Muslim 379). He would have to argue that this is better for humanity than for them to be created in Paradise and left there, because in that case their bliss would not be earned by effort and merit, and thus they would be heavily indebted. But if they had heard and obeyed, their bliss would be fair payment for their labor, and so they would not be indebted. I feel the need to apologize to you for subjecting your ears to this ridiculous reasoning, and to myself for relating it, to say nothing of rebutting it!

Consider, then: do you see how abominable the conclusions of reasoned opinion can be? You know that when children die, God Most High leaves them in a station of Paradise that is lower than those of pious adults. If they were to say, "Our God, do not

deny us what is best for us! It would be best for us if You raised us to the levels of those others," God would reply—according to the Mu'tazila—"How could I raise you to their levels, when they attained them by obedience and effort, and you died in infancy?" They would say, "It was You who caused us to die in infancy, thereby depriving us of the opportunity to live long lives and attain higher ranks in Paradise. It would have been better for us had You not made us die. Why did You do so?" God Most High would reply, "I knew that if you had lived, you would have become unbelievers and gone to Hell forever. I therefore knew that it would be better for you to die in infancy." Upon hearing this, the denizens of Hell who died as adults would cry out in anguish from the depths of Hell, "Did You not know that we would become unbelievers, too? Why did You not make us die in our infancy? We would be content with even a hundredth of the rank that those children enjoy!" At this point, the Mu'tazili would have no answer to offer on behalf of God, for the unbelievers would have outdebated Him—glory be to God, Who transcends the claims of the sowers of falsehood!

It is true that there is a certain mystery regarding "doing what is best" which is drawn from knowledge of the secret of God Most High's eternal decree; but the Mu'tazili does not pay any regard to this principle, for it is not something he can discover by reason alone. He can do no more than grope at it aimlessly, confused by conflicting opinions. This, then, is an example of a false reasoned opinion.

As for an example of analogy, what it means is to affirm a judgment for one thing by analogy to another. For instance, the Corporealists say that God is a body—Exalted and Transcendent is He beyond what they say! If we ask them why this should be so, they reply, "Because He is an agent and a maker, and so He must be a body by analogy with all other agents and makers." This analogy is false, because we can respond, "Why do you say

that the agent has a body *because* it is an agent?" This cannot be proved by weighing with the balances of the Qur'an. The appropriate balance is the Greater Balance of Equilibrium, which may be employed as follows: "Every agent is a body; the Creator is an agent; therefore He must be a body." We reply: "We admit that the Creator is an agent; but we do not admit the first premise, that every agent is a body. How do you know this?" At this juncture their only recourse is induction or an inclusive categorization, neither of which amount to proof here.

Our interlocutor's induction would be to say, "I have examined all manner of agents: weavers, surgeons, cobblers, tailors, carpenters, and so on, and found them all to be bodies. I therefore know that all agents are bodies." We would ask, "Have you examined every agent in existence, or have you missed any?" If he replied, "I have examined some," then his judgment would not necessarily apply to all. If he answered, "I have examined them all," we would not admit this, since he could not have knowledge of every agent in existence. How could he? Did his examination of them include an examination of the Creator of Heaven and Earth? If not, then he has not examined them all, but only some. If he has examined Him, then did he find Him to be a body? If he answers "Yes," we reply, "If you have observed this in the premise of your analogy, why have you then made it a premise with which to prove it? You have made your observation the very proof of what you observed, which is fallacious."ⁱ

His examination is like that of a person who examines horses, camels, elephants, insects, and birds, and sees that they all move upon feet, but has never seen a snake or worm, and so concludes that all animals move upon feet. Or he is like someone who observes animals chewing by moving their lower jaws and so concludes that

i This is the fallacy of begging the question (*petitio principii*).

this is true of all animals, not having seen a crocodile moving its upper jaw. It is possible that a thousand members of a genus could share a certain property, but a single member could differ from them all. Such judgments therefore cannot impart true certainty, and that analogy is false.

As for our interlocutor's resort to an inclusive categorization, it would be to say, "I have examined different kinds of agents and found that they are bodies. They are bodies either because they are agents, or because they exist, or for some other reason." He then discounts all other categories and concludes that they must be bodies because they are agents. This is the inclusive categorization by which Satan weighs his balances. We have already discussed its falsehood.

HE SAID: I believe that if all other categories are false, the category that you have in mind must be proven. I see this as a strong argument upon which most theologians rely for their doctrines. For instance, with regard to the question of seeing God, they say, "The Creator, Exalted is He, is visible because the world is visible. It is false to say that He is visible because He is white, for black things are also visible. It is false to say that He is visible because He is a substance, since accidents are also visible. It is false to say that He is visible because He is an accident, since substances are also visible. If all other categories are false, it can only be that He is visible because He exists." I would like you to show me how this balance is false, in a clear manner which I cannot doubt.

I SAID: I will give you a true example deduced from a false analogy, and then reveal how it works. It would be true for us to say, "The world is temporal." But if someone said, "It is temporal because it has a form, by analogy to houses and other buildings that have forms," that would be false and would not provide proof for the temporality of the world. This is because if one were to weigh it in the balance of truth, one would say: "Everything that

has a form is temporal; the world has a form; therefore the world is temporal." The second premise is admitted, but an opponent would not admit that "everything that has a form is temporal."

Here he might switch to induction and say, "I have examined everything that has a form and found it to be temporal: houses, vessels, garments, and so on." But you already know that this is fallacious. Or he might apply further scrutiny and say, "A house is temporal. Let us scrutinize its attributes. It is a body, it subsists in itself, it exists, and it has a form. These are four attributes. It would be false to argue [for its temporality] on the grounds that it is a body, or that it subsists in itself, or that it exists. Therefore it must be because it has a form, which is the fourth attribute."

The rejoinder to that is that it is false in many ways, of which I will enumerate four. Firstly, even if we admitted that the first three attributes cannot be the cause [of its temporality], that would not necessitate that it be the fourth, because there could well be some other limited cause which is neither general nor applicable beyond itself: such as it being a house, for instance. If it be affirmed that a thing other than a house is also temporal, the cause of that may also be limited to whatever makes that thing temporal, for it is conceivable that there be a special attribute that applies to them all without being applicable beyond any particular one of them.ⁱ

Secondly, such an argument could only be sound if the examination were exhaustive, such that it would be inconceivable that any category could have been omitted. If it were not exhaustive, nor restricted exclusively to affirmation and negation, it is conceivable that a category might have been missed. Such a comprehensive and restrictive examination would be no easy feat. Theologians and jurists do not usually rely on such, but instead say, "If there

i That is, houses are temporal because they are houses, rocks are temporal because they are rocks, and so on.

be another category, then produce it." The other might counter, "I am not obliged to produce it," and they would go on squabbling. The one making the analogy might argue, "If there were another category, we would know it and so would you. The fact that we do not know it implies that there is no other category, just as the fact that we can see no elephant here in our gathering proves that there is no elephant here." This poor fool does not realize that we are not accustomed to suddenly seeing elephants we did not know were there, but it is very common to suddenly notice ideas that had not occurred to us until that moment. It may be that there is another category that we are overlooking; perhaps we cannot see it now, and have never perceived it in all our lives.

Thirdly, even if we did admit that the examination was exhaustive, the elimination of the first three would not necessarily establish the fourth. The combinations that can be made from four are more than ten and twenty. It could be that the cause is one of these four, or two of them, or three of them; it is not certain to be either two or three. The cause might be that the house exists and has a body, or that it exists and is self-subsisting, or that it exists and is a house, or that it is a house and has a form, or that it is a house and is self-subsisting, or that it is a house and a body, or that it is a body and has a form, or that it is a body and is self-subsisting, or that it is a body and exists, or that it is self-subsisting and exists. These are some of the possible combinations of two attributes; you may imagine how many exist for three. In fact, it is most often the case that a judgment is based on the presence of many causes together. A thing is not visible merely because the beholder has an eye, as it may not be visible at night. Nor is it visible merely because it is illuminated by the sun, for a blind person cannot see it. Nor is it [always] so due to both of these causes alone, for air is not visible. In fact a thing is visible due to these causes together as well as it having a color, and other properties besides. That is the

rule that applies here and now; the vision of God in the Hereafter is another matter.

Fourthly, even if we did admit that the examination was exhaustive and restricted to four attributes, and we set aside the question of combining them, the fact would remain that eliminating three would not necessarily affirm the fourth in an absolute sense, but would only restrict the judgment to the fourth. Yet the fourth itself might be divisible into categories, with the judgment pertaining to only one of them. Suppose that in the first place our interlocutor had presented such a division, saying, "It must be because it is a body; or because it exists; or because it is self-subsistent; or because it has the form of a square, for instance, or the form of a circle." Even after he had eliminated the first three, the judgment would not attach to form in an absolute sense, for it might pertain to only one particular form among many.

It is as a result of overlooking these details that the theologians flounder and get caught up in so much contention. They hold to reasoned opinion and analogy, which cannot provide true certainty. They are useful only for speculative juristic analogies and for nudging the hearts of the masses in the direction of what is right and true, since their minds cannot extend to more far-flung reaches and their beliefs are built upon weak foundations. Consider how when an ordinary person has a headache, another may advise him, "Use rosewater. When I have a headache, I use it and it helps." It is as though he were saying, "This is a headache, and it will be soothed by rosewater, by analogy with my own headache." The sick man's heart inclines towards this, so he uses it. He does not say, "First prove to me that rosewater is good for any headache, whether caused by cold, heat, or stomach vapors. There are many kinds of headache. Prove to me that mine is like yours, and that my constitution, age, occupation, and circumstances are like yours. All of this will make a difference to the treatment."

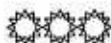
It is not in the nature of the masses to enquire into such matters, because they take no interest in them. Nor is it in the nature of the theologians; although, unlike the masses, they may take an interest, they are not guided to the paths that lead to true certainty. It is only in the nature of those who have learned from Aḥmad , those who are guided by the Light of God to the illumination of the Qur'ān, taking from it the true scale and the Just Balance, becoming *upright before God, witnesses in justice* (Qur'ān 5:8).

HE SAID: Now the signs and tidings of the truth appear to me from your words. Will you permit me to follow you, *that you may teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?* (Qur'ān 18:66).

I SAID: By no means! *You will not be able to bear patiently with me. For how could you bear patiently that which is beyond your ken?* (Qur'ān 18:67-68).

HE SAID: *You will find me patient, God willing, and I will not gainsay you in any matter* (Qur'ān 18:69).

I SAID: Do you suppose that I have forgotten your allegiance to the counsel of your fellows and your mother, and how strongly rooted conformism is in you? You are not suited to my company, nor am I to yours. Go now, for *This is where you and I part ways* (Qur'ān 18:78). I am too busy correcting myself to correct you, too busy with the Qur'ān's teachings to teach you. You will not see me again, because I shall not see you. I can spare no more time than this for rectifying the wayward and hammering cold iron. *I gave you sincere advice, but you do not love sincere advisers* (Qur'ān 7:79). Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and blessings be upon the Master of Messengers.





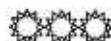
CONCLUSION

So there you have it, my brothers. That is the story of me and my companion. I have recounted it all to you together with all its faults, so that it might amuse you as well as offer you benefits with far wider applications than only correcting the proponents of *Ta'lim*. That was not, in reality, my objective. "I address my words to you, but the neighbor is listening!"

I ask all sincere readers to accept my apology when reading these discourses—for the preferences I have made regarding synthesis and analysis, the terms I have invented and substituted, and the images and comparisons I have contrived. I had a valid objective for each of them, a secret that is plain to people of inner vision. Beware of altering this system or stripping these ideas of their garb. I have shown you how concepts may be adorned with reference to transmitted tradition so that hearts may more readily accept them. But beware of making the concept your foundation, and the tradition subordinate and consequent to it! That would be truly abominable and detestable. God, Peerless and Perfect is He, has commanded you to forsake what is abominable, and to dispute in the way that is best. Do not contravene that commandment, lest you fall into ruin and misguidance and drag others down with you.

Yet what use will my counsel be when truth has faded, the floodgates have opened, and abomination has become widespread and taken wing in all directions, becoming a laughing matter in every land? Some people have *taken this Qur'ān as something to*

be discarded (Qur'ān 25:30), and turned the Prophetic teachings into *scattered dust* (Qur'ān 25:23). All this is the result of the meddling of ignorant folk who have laid claim to the status of defenders of the faith and true knowers of God. *Truly many lead others astray by their caprices, without any knowledge. It is your Lord who knows best who are the transgressors* (Qur'ān 6:119).





KNOWLEDGE TO BE WITHHELD
FROM THE UNQUALIFIED

Al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ghayr ahlih



*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

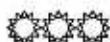
AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, Whose guidance has made us able to praise Him, and Whose grace has made us able to give thanks to Him. May blessings and peace be upon our master Muḥammad, the noblest scion of Adam ﷺ, and upon all his eminent Companions.

Know that every art has people who are qualified for it and know its worth; and to present the treasures of an art to those who are unqualified for it is to do it a disservice. The subject of this treatise is a precious calling, reserved only for those who are qualified for it. Anyone who keeps it from those who do not know its worth has fulfilled his duty to it. I offer this treatise to you, my dear brother Ahmad—may God protect you from reliance upon this realm of delusion and its inhabitants—in order that you may come to know the truth about some of the things that the Master of the Children of Adam ﷺ sought to know in their entirety when he prayed, “Dear God, show us things as they truly are!”

This treatise, which is reserved for the qualified, contains four parts. Part One concerns knowledge of Divine Lordship. Part Two concerns knowledge of the angels. Part Three concerns the true nature of miracles. Part Four concerns knowledge of what comes

after death, and the transfer from the world to the Hereafter. May God Most High grace us with success in earning His approval and love. He is the best giver of success and the best helper; and the final journey and return is to Him.





CHAPTER I

THE DIVINE LORDSHIP

Time cannot be limited, and the creation of time within time is impossible. The word "day" generally refers to a temporal being, and "the Days of God" in His Words *Remind them of the Days of God* (Qur'ān 14:5) means the stages of His creations and His works in various aspects. For example, when He says *in four days* (Qur'ān 41:10), these four days mean the material, the form, the bodies, and the souls of heaven, each of these constituting one day. And when He says, *He created the earth in two days* (Qur'ān 41:9), this means the material and the form. The materials of the heavens and the material of their constellations is one single form, while the material of the earth comprises pairings between females and males; and it is baser [than heaven] because it is promiscuous, accepting any mate indiscriminately. It also comprises inanimate objects, which include minerals, as well as plants, dumb animals, and man. The sky is at once heaven and earth. It is heaven inasmuch as it is above you, which is what linguists would say "heaven" means; but everything that is below the [first] sphere, namely the sphere of the moon, is considered to be "the earth" in relation to the spheres above it. Thus God says, *God it is Who created seven heavens, and of the earth their like* (Qur'ān 65:12). These seven

earths are: [1] the sphere of fire, [2] the sphere of air, [3] the sphere of dry clay above water, [4] the sphere of water, [5] the simple earth, [6] the intermixtures of these things, and [7] the atmosphere.ⁱ

Remarks on Certain Blessed Qur'ānic Verses

God says, *Or is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and what lies between them, theirs? Then let them ascend by some means* (Qur'ān 38:10). Ascension means for the baser to rise towards the nobler, all the way up to the Necessary Being; as He says, *And the ultimate end is to your Lord* (Qur'ān 53:42). And He says, *The Day We roll up the heaven as written scrolls are rolled up* (Qur'ān 21:104); and also, *The heavens and the earth were of one piece, and then We parted them* (Qur'ān 21:30). The former refers to the correspondence of the ecliptic to the celestial equator, and "parting" refers to the emergence of night.

On How Provision Is Destined and Assured

In addition to being affirmed by transmitted texts, this is also a rational truth. This is because God Most High apprehends His own Essence and all that His Essence necessitates, and therefore He apprehends all beings in existence, even if secondarily.ⁱⁱ Therefore He necessitates the existence all of them—by which I mean created beings—in the manner that they exist simply because He

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- i This is *al-āthār al-ulwiyya*, literally "the higher effects"—which was also the title by which Aristotle's *Meteorology* was known in Arabic, after the translation of Yaḥyā of Antioch.
 - ii In *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* al-Ghazālī discusses, and ultimately refutes, the idea that God's Knowledge of Himself is "primary" (*bil-qaṣd al-awwal*) while His knowledge of creation is "secondary" (*bil-qaṣd al-thāni*). For the translation of these terms, see Kwame Gyekye, "The Terms 'Prima Intentio' and 'Secunda Intentio' in Arabic Logic," *Speculum* 46, no. 1 (1971), 32–38.

apprehends the existence of them all from His Essence. And just as His apprehension of His Essence cannot possibly change, so too His apprehension of everything that His Essence necessitates; and everything whose existence He apprehends from His Essence, cannot change. The existence of all of this is necessary. Now, it is obviously true that the existence and preservation of all species of living beings, and man in particular, is something apprehended [by God]. The species can only be preserved by individuals who arrive at the stage of procreation, wherein they are able to beget other individuals like themselves; and this is only possible if they are themselves able to subsist for a certain duration. This subsistence is only possible if the constituents of life within the individual are satisfied. This is made possible by provision. Thus God Most High apprehends the existence of all things from His Essence, and the existence of all that He apprehends from His Essence is necessary. He apprehends that the preservation of the human species is by means of the subsistence and procreation of individuals; He apprehends that their procreation is by means of the subsistence of each individual; and He apprehends that the subsistence of each individual for the given duration requires the constituents of life, which are provision. Provision comes only from plants and living creatures, which provide bread and meat, as well as fruits and other sweet things. Provision must therefore be guaranteed by the predestining of the Compassionate and Most Merciful. Therefore He says, *And in heaven is your provision and what you are promised. So by the Lord of heaven and earth, it is as true as the fact that you can speak* (Qur'ān 51:22-23).

The True Meaning of Visions

Someone who does not know the true meaning of visions cannot know the meaning of their different categories, whether it be visions

of the Messenger ﷺ and the other Prophets, visions of deceased people, or visions of God Himself in dreams. The layperson supposes that if someone sees the Messenger of God ﷺ in a dream, they have seen his true person. Yet just as a meaning that is held in the soul can be expressed by the imagination as a word, so too everything that is engraved in the soul can be represented by the imagination as an image. I do not see how they can imagine that the actual person of the Messenger could be seen in a dream, when his person is secure in the Rawda' in Medina, and the grave has not been opened, nor has he emerged into a place where the dreamer could see him. Even if that were possible, the fact is that a thousand people in a thousand different places might see him in a single night, with various different appearances. The faculty of estimation can assist the intellect in realizing that a single person cannot be seen in two places at the same time, nor with two different appearances: tall and of middling stature; young, middle-aged, or old. If a person is unaware of the impossibility of this, he will be satisfied with his innate comprehension of the name and the outward appearance, without knowing the true nature and inner meaning. Yet there is no need to rebuke him, but only to discuss the matter further.

Someone might say, "What they see is his representation, not his person." One might then ask, "The representation of his person, or the representation of the true reality of his spirit, which transcends image and form?" If he replies that it is the representation of his person, meaning his flesh and bones, then why is there any need for his person, when his person can already be imagined and perceived by the soul? Suppose that someone saw his person after he died, with the spirit no longer present. They would not truly have seen

i The area of the Mosque of the Prophet extending between his tomb and the *minbar* (pulpit).

the Prophet, but only a body that used to move as the Prophet ﷺ moved. But then how could someone who sees the representation of his person be deemed to have truly seen him? The truth is that it is the representation of his sanctified spirit, which is Prophethood itself. The form that the dreamer sees is not the spirit, essence, or person of the Prophet, but a representation of him in truth.

You might object, "But then what is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, 'Whoever sees me in a dream sees me in truth, for Satan cannot take on my form'?" (Muslim 2268).

Our reply is that it means that what he sees is the representation of an intermediary between the Prophet and himself, by which God acquaints him with the Prophet. The essence of Prophethood, by which I mean the sanctified spirit that remained of the Prophet after his death, transcends color, shape, and form; but it continues to be presented to his Community by means of a true representation which does have color, shape, and form, even if the essence of Prophethood transcends all that. Likewise, the Essence of God transcends form and shape, but He is presented to His servant by means of a perceptible representation, whether light or some other beautiful image that is a fitting representation of true metaphysical Beauty, which is without form or color. This representation is true and real, a means of acquaintance. Someone who dreams may say, "I dreamed I saw God Most High," but [that is not true] in the sense of seeing His Essence, just as seeing the Prophet in a dream does not mean seeing his essence and spirit, or the essence of his person, but rather seeing a representation of him.

You might object, "But the Prophet has a likeness, but God Most High has no likeness."

Our reply is that this betrays ignorance of the difference between a likeness (*mathal*) and a representation (*mithāl*). A representation does not mean a likeness; the word "likeness" suggests equivalency in all attributes, while a representation does not require equivalency

at all. The intellect has a certain meaning that nothing else resembles, but we can use the sun to represent the intellect because there is a certain correspondence between them in one regard: visible things are revealed by the light of the sun, just as intelligible things are revealed by the intellect. This measure of correspondence is enough to make the representation valid. Or consider how a sultan can be represented in a dream by the sun, or a vizier by the moon, even though there is no resemblance of form or meaning between them, except that a sultan sits high above all others and his influence envelops all like light, while a vizier is an intermediary between the sultan and his subjects, reflecting his "light" upon them. This is a representation, not a likeness.

Thus God says, *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp...* (Qur'ān 24:35). What resemblance is there between His Light and the glass, niche, tree, or oil? Or consider how He says, *He sends down water from the sky so that the riverbeds flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries a foam that swells* (Qur'ān 13:17). This is meant to symbolize the Qur'ān, though the Qur'ān is an eternal attribute with no likeness, so how could water represent it? Or consider how the Messenger of God ﷺ often interpreted the dreams that were presented to him, and said that milk means Islam, or a rope means the Qur'ān, and so on. What resemblance is there between milk and Islam, or a rope and the Qur'ān, except in the sense of a representative correspondence? A rope is clung to for salvation, and so is the Qur'ān; milk provides nourishment for outward life, and Islam provides nourishment for the inward life. These are all representations, not likenesses. In fact, these things do not have likenesses at all, nor does God have any likeness; but He does have representations that can convey something intelligible to us about His Attributes. If someone asks us how God Most High creates things, how He knows things, how He increases things, how

He speaks to Himself, we must represent these things by reference to man. If man did not know these things about himself, he would not be able to understand how they represent the Attributes of God. Representation of God Most High is permitted; it is only likening Him to others that is false. A representation clarifies something, while a likeness compares it.

You might object, "This point that you have elaborated does not mean that God Most High can be seen in a dream; on the contrary, it means that the Messenger too *cannot* be seen, since what is seen is his likeness, not him. Yet he said, 'Whoever sees me in a dream, sees me.' Was this merely a figure of speech, meaning, 'It is as if he sees me, and what he hears from the representation is as if he heard it from me'?"

Our reply is that this is exactly what is meant when a person says, "I saw God in a dream," and no more. It does not mean that he saw His Essence as He truly is, for there is agreement that the Essence of God Most High cannot be seen, but that a representation which the dreamer believes to be the Essence of God Most High, or the essence of the Prophet, can indeed be seen. How could this be denied, when such dreams do in fact occur? Even if you have not had such dreams yourself, you must be aware that a great many other people have had them, even if the representation might be either true or false. The meaning of a true dream is that God Most High makes the vision an intermediary between the dreamer and the Prophet to communicate something. It is well within God's power to create such an intermediary to convey the truth to His servant; indeed, it has occurred, so how can it be denied?

You might say, "If the vision of the Messenger is possible, we know this because he stated it to be the case, thereby authorizing this belief unreservedly. But we cannot make any unreserved claims about God Most High unless we have authority to do so."

Our reply is that we have indeed been given authority to say so, because the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "I saw my Lord in the best image."ⁱ This is one of the reports that affirm that God has an image; and another is, "God Most High created Adam in His own image" (Muslim 2612). But this does not mean the image of the Essence, for the Essence has no image but is only disclosed by a representation. Likewise, Gabriel manifested in the image of Dīḥya al-Kalbī as well as other images; the Prophet saw him many times, but only saw him in his true form once or twice. The fact that he appeared in the image of Dīḥya al-Kalbī does not mean that the essence of Gabriel transformed into the image of Dīḥya, but only that this image appeared to the Messenger as a representation to convey from Gabriel what had been revealed to him. The same is true of His Words, *Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and it appeared before her in the form of a perfect man* (Qur'ān 19:17). This was not an actual transformation of the angel's essence, but rather Gabriel retained his true nature and form despite appearing to the Prophet in the image of Dīḥya al-Kalbī; and that being the case, the same thing is not impossible with God Most High, whether in the waking world or in a dream.

This constitutes textual authority for the unreserved claim that this is possible. In addition, many reports have been transmitted from the early Muslims in which they make this claim. Even if this textual evidence did not exist, we would say that it is permitted to make any statement about God Most High that is true, and there is no cause to prevent or forbid that as long as it would not give rise to errors in the mind of the listener. Now, the majority would not take such a statement to mean seeing the Essence of God, for accounts of such visions are commonplace. If you feel that someone

i Narrated by al-Daylamī (*Musnad* 2195) with this wording, and by al-Tirmidhī (*Sunan* 3233) with a similar wording.

will misunderstand you, then you should not use such unreserved expressions, but instead explain the matter to him. Likewise, it is permitted to speak of loving God Most High, yearning for Him, and desiring to meet Him, since although some people might get the wrong idea about what these expressions mean, the majority will understand them correctly without entertaining such false notions. When speaking of such matters, one must take account of the mental state of one's interlocutor. If there is no risk of misunderstanding, one may speak freely; otherwise, one must offer further explanation.

In sum, this reduces the dispute to the question of when it is permitted to speak freely. We can agree, however, that when the Essence of God Most High is "seen," what is actually seen is a representation. Those who say that it is impossible for God to be represented are mistaken; we are permitted to set forth representations of God and His Attributes. We hold Him to be transcendent above likenesses, but not above representations; and His is "*the Most Exalted Likeness*." (Qur'ān 16:60).

On the Meanings of Oneness and Absolute Independence In *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*

Say: He, God, is One. God, the Absolutely Independent. He neither begot, nor was begotten. And there is none comparable to Him (Qur'ān 112:1-4).

God Most High says, *Say: He, God, is One* with *Aḥad*, while elsewhere He says, *Your God is One God* (Qur'ān 2:163), with *Wāḥid*. There is a difference between *wāḥid* and *aḥad*. One can speak of the human being as "one person," or as "one species" [using *wāḥid*], which means that he is a group which is a group of its own. Thus *wāḥid* carries the intelligible and sensible meaning of something whose identity cannot be shared [by anything that is

not it].ⁱ *Aḥad*, for its part, means something that is not composed of parts in any sense whatsoever. *Wāḥid* negates any partner or likeness, while *aḥad* negates any multiplicity of essence.

Then God Most High says, *God, the Absolutely Independent* [*Ṣamad*]. The word *Ṣamad* means one who is independent and on whom all others depend. This indicates that God Most High is *Aḥad* and *Wāḥid* in Essence, because if He had any partner in His dominion He would not be Absolutely Independent and depended upon by all others; rather, He would have need of His partner in the partnership or duo. And if He were a single being composed of parts, He again would not be Absolutely Independent and depended upon by all others, for His constitution and existence would depend upon the parts that together formed His oneness. *Ṣamad*, therefore, entails both *Wāḥid* and *Aḥad*.

He neither begot means that His perpetual existence is not like the existence of man, whose species is preserved through begetting and procreation; rather, His existence is perpetual, beginningless, and endless. *Nor was begotten* means that His existence is not like that of man, who comes into being out of nothing and then continues to exist everlastingly, whether in a sublime Garden without end, or in a roaring pit of Fire without cease.

And there is none comparable to Him means that true existence is the existence of God, Hallowed and Most High, and that it is the existence which supplies the existence of all others, and does not receive its own existence from any other. This existence belongs to Him alone and no other.

Thus, *Say: He, God, is One* is an affirmation of His Transcendent Holy Essence; and then *God, the Absolutely Independent* is a negation of His dependence on others and an affirmation of their

i Nothing can share in the attribute of "humanity" without being human, and in that sense humankind is "one," even if there are billions of humans.

dependence on Him, and of His indivisible oneness; and then *He neither begot...* to the end of the *sūra* is a declaration that God is free of all that can be attributed to other than Him. There is no clearer or plainer way to know the Essence of God Most High than to declare Him free of the attributes of created beings.

Regarding the Divine Attributes

Some people imagine that there is a multiplicity in the Essence God Most High due to the numerousness of the Attributes. The correct view is that of those who say that the Attributes are neither Him nor other than Him. The reason for this confusion is that people imagine that there is a heterogeneity in the Attributes, when in fact there is not. To illustrate this, consider how a person may know how writing looks, and how the *Basmala* formula appears when written upon the page. That is one attribute, and it is complete because the object of knowledge conforms to it. If the knowledge of this writing is acquired, the image will appear upon the paper without requiring motion of the hand or the aid of pen and ink. This attribute, in as much as the object of knowledge is revealed by means of it, may be called "knowledge." Inasmuch as words designate it, it may be called "speech," since speech means that which is designated by verbal expression. Inasmuch as the existence of the object of knowledge conforms to it, it may be called "determinative power" (*qudra*). But there is no heterogeneity here between knowledge, speech, and power, for this is one attribute in itself, although these three perspectives are not one and the same. The one-eyed person looks through his one eye and sees nothing but the unqualified attribute, and says, "It is it." Then when he looks at the three perspectives, he says, "They are something other than it." But someone who takes into account both the unqualified

attribute and the perspectives looks through two healthy eyes, and so recognizes that they are neither it nor other than it.

Now although the discussion of the Attributes of God Most High is analogous to this example in one regard, it differs from it in another. To explain this in writing is by no means an easy task. Some people entertain the notion that it is not permitted to use examples to represent the Attributes of God Most High, but that is only because they do not know the difference between a representation and a likeness. Representations are required, as we explained earlier, because they allow for tangible forms to be referenced in order to clarify intelligible concepts, which then impart understanding. Tangible forms do not require examples to represent them, since they can be visualized by the mind. If someone sees a stove with a pot on top and fire between them, he does not need a representation to explain to him what he is seeing. Purely intellectual concepts that cannot be visualized or pinned down by the mind are the ones that require the assistance of examples, so that the weak-minded can grasp them. God has no likeness; as He says, *Nothing is like unto Him* (Qur'ān 42:11). But He does have representations. The Prophet's ﷺ words "God Most High created Adam in His own image" allude to this representation. God Most High and Holy exists, and He is Self-Subsisting, Ever-Living, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, and Speaking; and man is all of these. If man did not possess these attributes, he would not know God Most High. Thus the Prophet ﷺ said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." If someone cannot find an example of a thing in himself, it is difficult for him to believe or accept it. God Most High revealed to one of the Prophet, peace be upon them all, "O human! Know yourself, and you shall know your Lord." This is why the knowledge of man cannot encompass the most exclusive of God's Attributes: there is nothing in creation to serve as representations of examples of them. The same is true

of the Names that correspond to those exclusive Attributes of His, since man can only name a thing after he knows it. If man has no way of reaching or representing it, he cannot know it. If he has no name or signifier for it, how could he know it? This is why no one knows God but God Himself, by which I mean the more exclusive of His Attributes and His true nature.

If someone says, "Man is living, knowing, powerful, hearing, seeing, and speaking, and so is God Most High," he is not guilty of likening God to creation. Likening God to creation means affirming that God has a partner in His most exclusive Attributes. If someone says, "Black is an existing accident and a color, and white is an existing accident and a color," this does not mean he is likening black to white. The fact that they share the attributes of color, accident, and existence does not mean that they are similar. These attributes suffuse them both—and indeed, all things in existence share the property of existence in a general sense, but that does not make them the same. Black and white are not the same, despite sharing the qualities of color, accident, and existence. It is valid and correct for a thing to represent God, but it is impossible for it to be like Him. We might say, "God Most High controls and directs the world, though He is not in the world. Likewise, a man's finger moves by the direction of his knowledge and will, though the finger does not contain either knowledge or will." This makes the concept comprehensible to the weak-minded person who otherwise would have difficulty understanding how God could direct something without being spatially related to it or dwelling within it.

The Nature of God's Commandments to Man

When God Most High issues commandments to His servants, this is not analogous to the manner in which a man orders his servant to do things in which he has a personal interest, while not bothering

to instruct him regarding other matters that are of no use to him. God's commandments to His servants are more analogous to the instructions a physician gives to his patient. If the patient is dominated by heat, the physician tells him to drink cold things. It makes no difference to the physician whether the patient drinks them or not; it will not harm him if he disobeys, or benefit him if he obeys. The benefit or harm accrue solely to the patient, and the physician is merely a guide. If the patient has the good fortune to comply with the physician's instructions, he will recover. If not, his illness will only worsen until he dies. It makes no difference to the physician whether he recovers or dies, for he is independent either way. And just as God Most High created means of cure, He also created means of salvation, namely acts of obedience to Him, and restraining the soul from base desire through spiritual struggle, which cleanses it from the dross of ignoble characteristics and thereby saves it. For ignoble characteristics lead to ruin in the Hereafter, just as imbalanced humors lead to sickness in this world. Sins are to the life Hereafter as poisons are to life in this world, and there is medicine for the soul just as there is medicine for the body. The Prophets ﷺ are the physicians of souls, who guide humankind to the path of success by paving the way for purification of the heart. God Most High says, *Prosperous is the one who purifies [the soul], and ruined is the one who obscures it* (Qur'ān 91:9-10).

Now if the patient disobeys the physician's instructions and his condition deteriorates, it will be said that his sickness has worsened on account of his flouting the physician's orders; and if he obeys and recovers, it will be said that he recovered because he obeyed the doctor's orders diligently. But in reality, the sickness does not worsen because of the patient's disobedience itself, but rather because he did not follow the path of health to which the physician directed him. Likewise, God-consciousness is the means

of self-protection by which the heart is cured of its diseases. The diseases of the heart spoil the life of the Hereafter just as the diseases of the body spoil the life of the world.

Consider another example. A king sends for a subject of his who is absent, sending him money and a mount so that he can present himself before him to receive a certain title in his court, which will delight the subject, though the king has no real need for his service and could just as well do without him. If the subject squanders the mount and spends all the money on things other than supplies for the journey, he will be guilty of ingratitude. If he mounts up and sets out, spending the money on supplies along the way, he will prove himself a grateful subject—but he will not be doing the king any favors, because the king did not send for him or give him those gifts in order to benefit himself, but only to please his subject. If the subject does as his sovereign wishes, he will prove his gratitude; if he disobeys, he will prove his ingratitude.

Thus it is that it makes no difference to the Majesty and Independence of God Most High whether His servants have faith or disbelieve; but He does not approve that they disbelieve, since that is no good for them and will only lead to their ruin. The physician does not approve that his patients should die, and so he treats them; the king does not approve that his subject should languish far from him, and so he invites him nearer to please him, though he has no need for this himself. That is how the matter of religious responsibility should be understood. Acts of obedience are medicines, and sins are poisons which affect the heart; and none shall be saved *but only him who comes to God with a sound heart* (Qur'ān 26:89), just as none can be healthy but those whose constitutions are balanced. It is only right for the physician to tell the patient, "I have told you what is good for you and what is bad for you. If you obey, it is for your own good; if you disobey, then on your own head be it." Likewise, it is only right for God

Most High to say, *Whoever is guided, is guided only for the sake of his own soul; and whoever goes astray, goes astray only to its detriment* (Qur'ān 17:15); *Whoso does right, it is for his own good; and whoso does evil, it is to his detriment* (Qur'ān 41:46).

As for punishment for disobeying commands and flouting prohibitions, God Most High does not inflict it out of anger or vengeance. If someone does not have sex, God will punish him by denying him children; if someone does not feed his child, God will punish him with the child's death; if someone does not eat or drink, God will punish him with hunger and thirst; if someone does not take medicine, God will punish him with the pain of sickness. God's wrath with His servants is not the intent to cause pain. Causes and effects follow from each other in the world by the decree of the Causer of Causes; some of them lead to pain, others to pleasure, and only the Prophets know what the ultimate consequences will be. The same exact thing applies to the causal relationship between obedience and pleasure, and sin and pain, in the Hereafter. Asking why sin leads to punishment is like asking why living beings die from poison, or why poison causes death, or why the human body was made susceptible to poison so that poison affects it rather than being affected by it. That is no different from asking why God Most High created the human soul so that virtues perfect and save it while vices ruin it. God certainly had the power to make it possible for the human being to be full without eating and quenched without drinking, or to reproduce without sexual intercourse, or to grow without being nursed. But He chose to link causes to effects, and did so for a wise reason known only to Him, Exalted is He, and to those *firmly grounded in knowledge* (Qur'ān 3:7).

That is not something to wonder at. What is wondrous is this wise direction and precise order. Upon my word, those who are not guided to the wisdom that lies behind it find it strange only because of their lack of guidance. Had He ordained otherwise,

there would have been no part to play for the plants and animals, which are the most delicate and well-balanced of living creatures, such as sheep, goats, partridges, chickens, and so on. The perfection of plants lies in their being consumed by a higher order of being, namely animals. This is why the parts of them that break down are replaced by others that resemble them, wherein lies their perfection. The same is true for the relationship between slaughtered animals and humans, or between humans and angels in the Garden of Eden; as God Most High says, *Angels shall enter to them from every gate* (Qur'ān 13:23). As for the fact that some dumb animals are consumed by others, predatory animals possess certain ecological and medicinal benefits, which are known to experts in the sciences of ecology and medicine. A person who finds it strange that these things should be ordered within this universal hierarchy, according to the decree of the Almighty and All-Wise, is like a blind man who goes into a house and stumbles over the earthenware that is placed around the courtyard, and says to the people of the household, "Have you lost your minds? Why not put those jugs away instead of leaving them lying all over the place?" He is then informed that in fact they are in their proper places, and the only problem lies in the one who is unable to see them. Or he is like a man without a sense of smell who objects to his host presenting him with perfumes and fragrant fruits, and says, "This only takes up space in the room!" He is then informed that there are more uses for wood than just kindling, but his impaired sense of smell prevents him from realizing it.

At this juncture another question may arise, which is: "Why would God Most High command something, and yet forbid any investigation into it? After all, insight is unobtainable without investigation." Now this objection is unjustified, because knowledge requires either firm belief or true recognition. Firm belief is acquired by means of simple conformity through trust and faith, while

recognition is acquired through proof, which is reached by means of investigation. Investigation is not forbidden to all humankind, but only to those of them whose minds are too weak to discover the proofs and supports for it. Consider how a physician tells a sick person to drink a certain medicine but discourages him from investigating its healing properties, since he would not be able to understand, and it would exhaust him and make his illness worse. But in those rare instances when a patient is intelligent and learned in the ways of medicine, the physician will not prevent him from investigating the matter or discourage him from discussing the relationship between his medicine and his illness. Indeed, if he sees that the patient will not simply take him at his word or just follow him blindly, on account of his own intelligence and understanding of medical matters, and that if he does understand the cause and the relationship he will take the medicine, but otherwise he will refuse to obey blindly, the physician is obliged to explain it to him. He need not prevent him from investigating the matter if he recognizes that he is capable of grasping it. However, this is a very rare situation and most people do not have the capacity for it. The same applies to investigating the causes and mysteries of divine matters such as these.

As for the question of why animals are made subject to man, [to ask] this is like if a person walks a few steps and then looks upon a pleasant vista, and so someone asks, "Why did he burden his feet and put them at the service of his eyes? Surely his eyes are his instruments, just as his feet are, so why should he burden one of them with the service of the other, which remains comfortable?" This betrays ignorance of the divine apportioning and the hierarchy of beings. Any intelligent person knows that the imperfect is forever being sacrificed for the sake of the perfect, and is subdued to its service. This is wisdom itself, and in no way unjust. Injustice means to usurp the property of another, but there is nothing that

does not belong to God Most High, such that He could usurp it unjustly. Injustice is therefore impossible for Him. No matter what He does in His dominion, it is just.

Divine Revelation and Law do not affirm things that the intellect cannot accept—if you mean things that the intellect knows to be impossible, such as God Most High creating another instance of Himself, or affirming two opposites simultaneously. But if you mean things that the intellect has difficulty grasping, or things that it cannot completely comprehend, then this is by no means impossible. It is akin to phenomena known to the science of medicine, such as the way magnets attract iron, or how if a pregnant woman walks over a certain kind of snake she will miscarry, and other peculiarities. The intellect has difficulty accepting these things, in the sense that it does not understand their nature and cannot independently apprise them; but this does not make them impossible. Not everything the intellect cannot grasp is impossible.

Imagine that we had never seen fire, and then someone told us, "I can place pieces of wood together and then bring forth between them a red object the size of a lentil, and it will consume this whole town and everyone in it, leaving nothing behind, without taking them into itself or growing larger; and then it will consume itself too, and neither it nor the town will remain." We would say that the intellect rejects this notion and finds it unacceptable. But that is just what fire does, and experience proves it. In the same way, Revelation may comprise similar wonders that are not impossible, though they may seem unlikely. There is a difference between "unlikely" and "impossible"; "unlikely" means that a thing is unfamiliar, while "impossible" means that it cannot even be conceived of.

As for the meaning of the Words of God Most High, *He is not questioned about what He does, but they shall be questioned* (Qur'ān 21:23), and, *He will say, "My Lord, why have You resur-*

rected me blind, though I used to have eyesight?" (Qur'ān 20:125), the word "question" can sometimes mean an interrogation, as when someone debates someone and presents his question to him; but at other times it means no more than a request for information, as when a pupil asks a question of his teacher. God Most High cannot be interrogated, and that is the meaning of *He is not questioned about what He does*. No one can ask Him "Why?" as though He were obliged to explain Himself. But that does not mean that He cannot be asked in the sense of seeking information or understanding, which is what is meant by *My Lord, why have You resurrected me blind?*

That is sufficient to answer these questions. If someone rises above the level of blind conformity thanks to the least degree of intelligence, but does not reach the level of independent thought, he will be one of the ruined. We seek refuge with God from intelligence that brings no benefit! Ignorance is more conducive to salvation than that. As a poet said:

I have never seen in people a defect as bad as this:
To fail to reach perfection although they are able to.

Rational Proofs for Some Fundamental Beliefs

If you know that you are a temporal being, and that every temporal being requires a creator, you have enough proof to justify belief in God. There are no truths more obvious to the intellect than these two: that you are temporal, and that a temporal being cannot be its own creator.

If you know your own self, and that you are a substance whose special property is the capacity to know God and to know that which is intangible, and that the body is not the means by which your essence subsists, and that the destruction of the body is not

the end of your existence—if you know all this, then you have sufficient proof of the Last Day. That can only mean that you have just two days: the present day, in which you are occupied with your body, and another day, on which you will part with that body. Since you do not subsist through your body, your parting with it at the moment of death will be that other day.

You know also that when you part with your body, you will part with tangible things. Then you will pass on, either to bliss, which is the knowledge of God Most High that constitutes the special property of your essence and your ultimate pleasure, and would always have been your primordial nature had you not fallen sick by inclining toward corporeal desires; or else to the torment of being veiled from God Most High: *And a barrier will be set between them and what they desire* (Qur'ān 34:54).

You know also that knowledge of God is achieved by invocation, contemplation, and turning away from everything besides God Most High; and that the cause of the sickness that prevents remembrance and knowledge of God is pursuing corporeal desires and worldly avarice. You know that God Most High is able to communicate this to all of His servants by revealing it to a chosen few of them; and you know that indeed He has done so, for you know of His Messengers and believe in them with proof.

If you know that these communications to the Prophets are clothed in words and expressions which are revealed to them and conveyed to their hearing, whether in the waking world or in sleep, then you believe in the Scriptures.

If you know that the Acts of God are divided into what He does through an intermediary and what He does without one, and that His intermediaries are of differing levels, then the intermediaries that are nearest to Him are what are called angels. However, to come to realize this by means of rational proof is difficult and requires much exposition. Therefore it is enough to believe what

the Messengers have told you about it, once you have determined the truthfulness of the Messengers by rational proof. Make do with this, for that is one of the ranks of faith: *God will raise the ranks of those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge* (Qur'ān 58:11).

Procreation and Spontaneous Generation

If a thing can come into existence by procreation (*tawālud*), then it is not impossible for it to do so by spontaneous generation (*tawallud*); and vice versa. When God says, *Truly We created man from a drop of mixed fluid* (Qur'ān 76:2), this refers to procreated man; and when He says, *We created you from dust* (Qur'ān 22:5), this refers to spontaneously generated man. Scorpions can spontaneously generate from basil and breadcrumbs, as can snakes from honey, bees from sheep carcasses, bugs from vinegar, geckos from cauliflowers, beetles from dung, lesser scorpions from buckthorn seeds, snakes from hair, mice from clay and mud, birds from the moist clay in which cane grows, especially water birds, and so on—as is described in the talismanic literatureⁱ and elsewhere. These spontaneously generated creatures then procreate, and their species endures by procreation. The correspondence of the celestial equator to the ecliptic is one of the signs that the lower world must eventually degenerate, and so are the seasonal changes—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Reproduction and procreation will come to an end; as God Most High says, *All that is upon it—that is, upon the earth—will perish* (Qur'ān 55:26). God created Adam from dust and then procreation followed, and similar instances of

i This may refer to the *Hermetica* texts attributed to the legendary Hellenistic sage Hermes Trismegistus, which were translated into Arabic in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries and include discussions of spontaneous generation, among many other occult subjects.

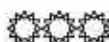
the same can be observed. The same is true of arts and crafts, which arise by inspiration and are then taught and learned. Likewise, fire is kindled in a fire-pit, after which its flames may be borrowed. *That is the decree of the Mighty, the All-Knowing* (Qur'ān 36:38), Who created the obliquity between the celestial equator and the ecliptic, and between them created Adam from dust, then *made his seed from an extract of base fluid, then shaped him and breathed into him of His Spirit* (Qur'ān 32:8-9). Anyone who doubts as to the way that creation began, or that the Wise Creator established procreation and spontaneous generation, should consider the tangible things we mentioned above. As for the re-creation in the Hereafter and how souls and spirits will be returned to their bodies, it will be discussed in a chapter of its own.

Regarding Originated Entities

God Most High brought all originated and created entities into being in a hierarchical order. He is the First, before Whom there is no other first, and from Him came all originated entities and indeed all possibilities, which descended in order from the noblest to the basest, which is matter. He then began from the basest and returned to the noblest, finally reaching man. It is for man to embark upon this return by purifying his soul; hence God says, *Return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing* (Qur'ān 89:28). Therefore He says, *He is the First and the Last, and the Manifest and the Hidden* (Qur'ān 57:3). He is the Manifest because it is innately obvious to every mind that everything must have a beginning, that every temporal entity must have a creator, and that every possibility must have something to make it come into existence. He is the Hidden because none but He can know His own special property. It may be that He is hidden because of how manifest He is, just

as the sun—though this is a farfetched comparison—is so bright and clear that one cannot look directly at it.

The Balance is the means by which the true natures of things are discerned and true beliefs are distinguished from false ones. It is the intermediary between heaven and earth; as God says, *And the heaven He raised, and the balance He set, that you transgress not in the balance but observe the measure justly, and do not fall short in the balance; and the earth He laid down for all creatures* (Qur'ān 55:7–10). That Balance is one of the secrets of divine lordship, known only to *those firmly rooted in knowledge* (Qur'ān 3:7, 4:162). God knows best.





CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ANGELS

The angels, jinn, and devils are self-subsistent substantial beings that differ in nature just as species do. For instance, power is different from knowledge, and knowledge from power, and both are different from color, but color, power, and knowledge are alike inasmuch as they are all accidents that subsist through other entities. In the same way, there are differences between angels, jinn, and devils, but they are all self-subsistent substantial beings. The nature of the difference between jinn and angels is unknown; it may be a difference of species like that between horse and man, or it may be a difference of accident like that between an imperfect and a perfect man. The same is true of the difference between angels and devils; it may be that they are the same species but differ in accidents, like the difference between a good man and an evil man, or the difference between a Prophet and a saint. However, it is more likely that they are different species. God Most High knows best.

These aforementioned substances are indivisible. What this means is that the locus of knowledge of God Most High is one and indivisible, since one instance of knowledge can have only one locus. The same is true of the nature of man. Knowledge and ignorance of one thing in one locus is contradictory, but not in two

different loci. As for the question of whether or not this indivisible substance is spatially delimited, this comes down to the issue of the indivisible part.²¹ If there is no such thing, this substance is indivisible and unconfined. If there is such thing as an indivisible part, this substance might be confined to space. Some say that it cannot be indivisible and unconfined, because God Most High is indivisible and unconfined; and what would then make Him different from that substance? But this is not a sound argument, because it could be that they differ in the nature of their essences, even if both are devoid of divisibility, confinement, and spatiality. Those are only negations, and essential nature is what matters. To negate the same things in respect of two different entities does not make them the same. Consider how two accidents with differing natures can both occupy the same locus: the fact that they both require a locus, and the fact that they share the same locus, do not make them the same.²² The inverse is also true: if two things are both free of need for a locus or a spatial position, that does not mean that they are the same.

These substances—the substances of the angels—can be seen, even though they are not tangible. This vision takes place in two ways. Firstly it can be a representation, as when God Most High says, *Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and it appeared before her in the form of a perfect man* (Qur'ān 19:17), and as the Prophet ﷺ used to see Gabriel in the image of Dihya al-Kalbī. Secondly, some angels possess tangible bodies, just as our intangible souls possess tangible bodies, which are the locus of their actions and the world in which they dwell. It may be that those tangible angelic bodies can only be seen when the light of Prophethood shines upon them,

i Meaning an atom or the smallest possible physical particle in existence.

ii An example of the fallacious reasoning the author is describing here: "This wallet is leather, and this wallet is black; therefore black and leather are the same thing."

just as tangible bodies in our world can only be seen when the light of the sun shines upon them. The same is true of jinn and devils.

When Two Similar Constitutionsⁱ Are Very Similar

It is not impossible for one constitution (*mizāj*) to be very similar to another. When one constitution is related to another which is very similar to it, their relationship is one of close affiliation (*muqārana*). If a person has a particular constitution and a particular soul, and then he dies and another constitution comes into existence which is similar to his, which is present in the celestial spheres and forms, then a constitution comes into existence and the sphere takes on a particular disposition (*hay'a*). Those forms then return [to be manifested] in their entirety, in such a manner as is possible for them. Even if it is not in a relationship specific to a single origin,ⁱⁱ the constitution that comes into existence makes its claim upon another soul; and this soul will have a certain connection to the departed soul which belonged to that similar constitution. The departing soul does not attach to that constitution entirely, for it is impossible for two souls to control one body. It attaches to that constitution in a lesser way than the new soul does, and becomes more good if it is good, more evil if it is evil. This is why it is said

i By "constitution" (*mizāj*) the author means an individual's psychological and physical nature as defined in terms of the traditional framework of the four humors, representing heat, cold, dryness, and moistness.

ii The text is somewhat unclear here, in part because it may have been corrupted; but this passage may refer to Ibn Sinā's refutation of the transmigration of souls, wherein he states that "after the death of the body, souls can attach themselves to a celestial sphere and employ an aspect of the sphere...as a surrogate brain." The idea of souls entering bodies at the moment when they come to possess constitutions that "make their claim" upon them is also found in Ibn Sinā. See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 109–115.

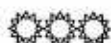
that every human being has a jinn which resembles it and helps it, or a devil which resembles it and misleads it.

If two constitutions come into existence at the same time in two bodies or in two places, and two souls come into existence for them, they will be contemporaries; souls can be contemporaries, just as bodies can. When the influence of the departing spirits is particularly strong upon a person's spirit, these connections will give rise to certain kinds of characteristics in him. He might become a soothsayer, oracle, astrologer, or the like. It may be that when the estimative faculty leaves the body, the tangible world becomes a body for it instead of its passing on to the higher world, so that it is able to behold particular causes in this world, whereby the embodied soul connected to it may receive certain information.

When such entities are evil they are extremely evil, because they have escaped from matter. The evil ones are devils, while the good ones from the imperfect class are jinns. Jinns and devils possess attachments which human beings take hold of. There are also spiritual acts which give rise to natural acts. Detachment from matter is a sign of complete power, whether that power be evil or good. As for the beings that sit on the right and left sides of every person, much has been said about them, but the truth is that this is a secret known only to the Prophets and Messengers ﷺ.

The angels of the heavens who manage and conduct the celestial bodies are in numbers known only to God Most High, Who says, *None knows the hosts of your Lord but He* (Qur'ān 74:31). The Angel of Death is the angel whom God Most High commands to claim spirits, which involves the dispersal of the constitution that had claimed acceptance by that soul, like a lamp being blown out. There are two kinds of blowing: blowing that kindles: *We breathed into her of Our spirit* (Qur'ān 21:91), and blowing that extinguishes: *And the Trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will swoon* (Qur'ān

39:68); and He says, *Then it will be blown again, and behold, they will be standing, beholding* (Qur'ān 39:68).





CHAPTER 3

MIRACLES AND OTHER PHENOMENA OF THE PROPHETS

The pebble glorifying God in the palm of the hand; the transformation of the staff into a serpent; the speech of animals; the mutton shank that cried out to the Prophet ﷺ after the Jews had poisoned it, "Do not eat me, I am poisoned!"—such things are divided into three categories: tangible, mental, and imaginal.

The first category, tangible, means that God creates knowledge, life, and power in the pebble so that it is able to speak, or creating intelligence, power, and articulacy in the dumb animal. This is not impossible, since God Most High is able to create life, power, and flesh in basil so that a scorpion is created from it, and to do the same in the buckthorn seed, and to create bees from the flesh of cattle, and to create human beings from sperm drops, and to create all animals from their own matter. That being so, He is certainly able to create life and power in a pebble as a miraculous gift to a sanctified Prophetic soul. Anyone who witnesses a slithering snake created from a woman's hair will no longer doubt that hair can transform into a snake, so why should he doubt that a staff could be similarly transformed? After all, a staff is made from wood, which once possessed an animate vegetal soul, but hair never did

so. Bodies are equivalent, and if such is possible for a human body, it is possible for any other body. If the human body is capable of these things because of the balance of its constitution, then any other body is capable of having a balanced constitution. If balance comes down to heat and moisture alone, then it is not impossible for any body to receive heat and moisture. The supplication and aspiration of the Prophet is what caused these things to occur without delay or interval, even though God Most High would normally create such things over a long period. This is where the nobility of the Prophets manifests. The breaking of physical norms is not impossible. Consider the sun, and fire. The effect that the sun has over liquids and other things is gradual and takes time, but fire heats them immediately. Why should it be impossible for the will of the Prophets to act in a manner analogous to how fire heats things, rather than to how the sun heats them?

The second category, mental, is what is meant by God's Words, *There is nothing that does not glorify Him with praise* (Qur'ān 17:44). This refers to the way in which all created things attest to their Creator and Maker, just as the building attests to the builder, or writing to the writer. This is called "the tongue of state" (*lisān al-hāl*), while theologians call it "the evidentiary value of evidence for what it proves." Only fools are unaware of this level.

The third category, imaginal, means that the "tongue of state" becomes tangible and perceptible by means of representation. This is the sole preserve of the Prophets ﷺ, although the tongue of state can be represented in dreams to non-Prophets, who may hear sounds or words. For example, a person might dream that he sees a camel or a horse speak to him, or that a dead person gives him something, takes him by the hand, or takes something from him, or that his finger becomes a sun or a moon, or that his fingernail becomes a lion, or other such things that people see in dreams. The Prophets see such things in the waking world too,

and these things speak to them in the waking world. The sleeping person only realizes this because he wakes up and differentiates between sleep and wakefulness. When a person possesses perfect sainthood, the rays of this sainthood emanate from him into the imaginations of those around him so that they can see what he sees and hear what he hears. Imaginal representation is the most well-known of these three categories, but it is obligatory to believe in them all.

Intercession

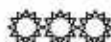
Regarding the intercession of the Prophets and saints, "intercession" (*shafā'a*) means a light that emanates from the divine Presence upon the substance of Prophethood and spreads from it to every substance that has a strong connection with the substance of Prophethood. This connection is established by ardent love, devoted adherence to the Sunna, and frequent invocation of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ. It resembles the way that when sunlight shines upon water, it reflects from it onto a particular part of the wall, not every part of it. The reason why that part of the wall is singled out for the reflection is that there is a certain connection between the water and that part of the wall, and all the others areas of the wall lack that connection. If a line were drawn from that part of the wall to the place where the light hits the water, the angle it formed with the ground would be equal to the angle formed by a line drawn from the same spot on the water to the disc of the sun, neither wider nor narrower than it. This kind of connection can only exist for one particular place in the wall. And just as there are positional connections that cause light to reflect in a certain way, there are also metaphysical connections that cause the same thing for metaphysical substances. If realization of the divine Oneness holds sway over a person, his connection to the divine Presence is

confirmed, and the light shines upon him without any intermediary. If adherence to the Sunna, emulation of the Messenger, and love for his followers holds sway over a person, but he does not have a firm footing in realization of the divine Oneness, his connection requires an intermediary in order to be fulfilled. He will need an intermediary to kindle from that fire, just as the wall that is not exposed to the sun requires the intermediary of the water that is exposed to it.

The nature of intercession in this world is comparable to that. A vizier who has a hold upon the heart of the king might convince him to excuse the lapses of the vizier's colleagues—not because there is any special relationship between his colleagues and the king, but because there is one relationship between them and the vizier and another between the vizier and the king. The king is gracious to them through the intermediary of the vizier, not directly. If there were no intermediary they would receive no grace at all, as the king only recognizes the vizier's colleagues and their close ties to him because the vizier informs him of them and intimates his desire that they be pardoned. When he informs the king of them and drops hints in this direction, it is called "intercession" in a figurative sense; but in reality the true intercessor is his standing with the king, and the words he speaks only serve to make his desire known.

God, however, has no need to be informed. If the king were already aware of [the colleagues'] close ties to the vizier, the vizier would not have to say anything at all, and pardon would be issued through an intercession that was entirely non-verbal. God Most High possesses that knowledge. If He permitted the Prophets ﷺ to give voice to things that are already known to Him, they would utter nothing but words of intercession. And if God Most High wished to represent the true nature of intercession by using a comparison accessible to the senses and the imagination, such a comparison

would have to involve expressions that are conventionally understood to denote intercession in the world. This is indicated by the way in which light reflects upon things because of a positional connection. Everything related in the Tradition that describes the means of meriting intercession refers to something connected to the Messenger ﷺ, whether it be invoking blessings upon him, visiting his grave, responding to the muezzin and supplicating for him after the azan, and so on. All of these strengthen the bond of affection, love, and correspondence with him.





CHAPTER 4

WHAT COMES AFTER DEATH

Punishment in the Grave

When the soul departs from the body it takes with it the faculty of imagination, as we have seen. It is entirely separated from the body, taking no measure of corporality with it. At the moment of death, it is aware that it is leaving the body and the lower world, and it imagines itself to be the human being who has died and been buried, retaining his image just as it imagined and estimated in the world. It imagines that its body is buried and that painful torment is being visited upon it as living punishments, as are described in the true Tradition. This is the punishment in the grave. If the soul is saved, it envisions the body in a comfortable situation that corresponds to the things in which it believed: gardens, rivers, meadows, servants, houris, cups of pure wine. This is the reward of the grave. Thus the Prophet ﷺ said, "The grave is either a meadow of Paradise or a pit of Hellfire" (Tirmidhi 2460). The reality of [one's being in] the grave resides in these conditions, and punishment or reward in the grave is as we have just described. The second genesis is when the soul exits the dust of these conditions like an infant exiting the womb. God Most High says, *Say,*

He Who originated them the first time will give them life, and He knows every creation (Qur'ān 36:79). The fact that He follows this by saying *He Who made for you fire from the green tree; and behold, you kindle from it* (Qur'ān 36:80) is a clear proof and illustrative example of this genesis.

The Moment of the Resurrection

The Prophet ﷺ said, "When someone dies, his Resurrection has begun."ⁱ This construction contains the particle *fa-*, which denotes chronological succession, meaning that the Resurrection of the deceased person comes at the moment of his death. It is like saying, "When someone steals a full *niṣāb* measure of silk, he incurs the penalty of the amputation of his hand." This denotes immediate succession with no delay. The same construction is found in the Words of God Most High, *Whoever turns his back to them on that day, unless maneuvering for battle or joining a company, then incurs the wrath of God* (Qur'ān 8:16).ⁱ The Greater Resurrection is a return to God Most High which He alone will bring to pass at a time known only to Him. Although there are similarities between some times and durations, in reality each one of them has its own special property determined by a certain type of existence, as can be observed in matters of agriculture, procreation, and other things. The theologians say that this is due to the will of God Most High, and that He selects times in which to bring certain beings into existence according to His will and volition, although all times are alike in being subject to His omnipotence and His Eternal Essence. The philosophers say that temporal things are instigated by the motions of the spheres, whose cycles are divergent, and that

i The purpose of citing this verse here is to provide another example of the Arabic particle *fa-* denoting immediate consequence or succession; in the verse, the *fa-* occurs before the word "incurs."

every shape is distinct from all others, as is affirmed by the laws of Euclid; hence every shape is distinct and unrepeatable, even if it seems to repeat. In this way they refute the claim of the astronomers regarding the repetition and shape of the spheres, which means that a new cycle distinct from all others could arise, causing unusual and unprecedented lifeforms to come into existence.

When we throw a rock into a pool of water, a circular shape is formed on its surface whose size corresponds to the depth of the water; the deeper the water, the larger the circle. If we throw another rock in before the first circle is finished, the motion of the water the second time will not necessarily be the same as it was the first time, because for the first the water was still, while for the second it was in motion. The shape of the ripples made by the stone thrown into moving water will differ from those formed by the still water. The shapes differ, despite the cause being the same, because of how the effect of the first meets with the second. Suppose that the ripple formed in the moving water happened to have a different shape, even though all of the entities, constituents, and substances involved were the exact same as those which formed the first shape. Likewise, it is not impossible that the eternal divine Will could have decreed for a particular cycle of the spheres to differ from the others, such that it occasioned an order of existence and creation that differed from the usual order. Nor is it impossible that this order could be entirely new and unprecedented, or that it could be decreed that it endure forever after without being supplanted as those previous cycles were, so that the newly-created order continued to exist as its own genus, even though the conditions that it contains might undergo change.

The return of the Greater Resurrection is the result of that unusual shape occasioned by cosmic causes. It is a universal cause that gathers together all spirits, its properties embracing them all; an all-encompassing resurrection, ordained for a specific time which

is beyond human power to identify. None can know its time, not even the divinely sent Prophets ﷺ; the Prophets, too, only have revealed to them as much as their respective capacities and powers of endurance permit.

Therefore there is no argument, whether theological or philosophical, to prove the impossibility of this, and so it is obligatory to believe in it, provided that Revelation has proclaimed it plainly without leaving room for speculation or figurative interpretation. In this case, Revelation states the matter so directly and plainly that it must be believed in and no figurative interpretation is possible. Just as it is possible for a celestial cycle to cause unprecedented lifeforms to come into existence, it is possible for a time to come wherein the dead are gathered and their parts are collected and restored to their bodies and spirits. An ignorant person might observe winter and find it unlikely that plants or fruits could ever grow, but when spring arrives he sees it for himself. There is an interval between the times of the two seasons in this world, just as there is a vast cosmic interval between the time of the first genesis of man by procreation and the time of his second genesis by revival and resurrection, the former being barely comparable to the latter.

The Return of the Soul to the Body

The soul's return to the body at the Resurrection after having been parted from it is possible. It is by no means impossible, nor should it even be marveled at. Indeed, there is more cause to marvel at the soul's attachment to the body in the first place than at its return to it after having been parted. The influence the soul has over the body is that of action and control. There is no rational proof that such a return is impossible, or that the body could not be made ready to receive its influence and control once more. However, there is one objection that might remain for some weak-minded

people, which is that the human body becomes prepared to receive the soul gradually: a sperm-drop in a secure housing, then a clot, and so on until the creation is complete. If not for this, it would not be ready to receive such control.

The rebuttal of this objection is that as we saw earlier, it is procreation that requires this gradual progression, whereas spontaneous generation is not gradual but instant. Consider how a mouse that comes into existence through procreation does so gradually by the process of male and female coupling, then gestation and birth, while a spontaneously generated mouse comes into existence all at once. There is no bit of clay or soil that is part mouse and part potential mouse. Likewise, the flies that spontaneously generate from mold during the summer come into existence all at once, and there is no such thing as mold that is almost a fly but still not entirely transformed into one. The Second Genesis will be the spontaneous regeneration of those parts that existed in the beginning, though they subsequently dispersed and lost their form. God Most High, the Giver of Forms, will return those forms to their matter, and that particular constitution will occur once more, whereupon the soul that it was allocated when it first came into being will be returned to it and be restored to control over it with the same relationship they had before.

By way of comparison, imagine a passenger on a ship which sinks and breaks apart, so he swims to an island. Then all the parts of the ship are spontaneously restored to its original design and fastened together. So the sailor returns to the ship and sets out in it, steering it in whatever direction he wishes. The resurrection of the body and the reassembling of its parts and constitution do not require that a new soul be allocated to it, for it is only the genesis of the constitution that requires a new soul, while its restoration to its original state requires no more than that the original soul be returned. To suppose and imagine that the parts of the earth

cannot allow that to happen is completely unfounded. Who would compare man and the earthly particles within him to the parts of the earth, and what geometrician could measure such things?

Also of note here is the discrepancy between the divine Scriptures in this regard. The Torah says that the inhabitants of Paradise will remain there for fifteen thousand years and then become angels, while the inhabitants of Hell will remain there for that long or longer and then become devils. The Evangel says that people will be resurrected as angels who neither eat, sleep, drink, or procreate.ⁱ The Qur'ān says that humankind will be resurrected just as God Most High created them in the beginning; as He says, *They will then say, "Who shall bring us back?" Say, "He Who originated you the first time"* (Qur'ān 17:51). It also tells of how Abraham عليه السلام asked, *And Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead"* (Qur'ān 2:260), and how 'Uzayr عليه السلام said, *"How shall God give life to this now that it is dead?" So God caused him to die for a hundred years, then resurrected him* (Qur'ān 2:259), and says of the People of the Cave: *And so it was that We awakened them, that they might question one another. One of them said, "How long have you tarried?" They said, "We have tarried a day, or part of a day." They said, "Your Lord knows best how long you have tarried. Send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city, and let him find which food is the purest, and bring you a supply thereof. Let him be careful, and make no one aware of*

i This may refer to the Gospel of Luke 20:35–36: *The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage; but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels, or some version of it that reached the author, although this passage describes the life of this world rather than the Hereafter. The reference to the Torah is harder to identify; al-Ālūsī cites this passage of al-Maḥnūn in his Rūḥ al-bayān (23/62), and notes that converts to Islam from Judaism told him they had searched in vain for any such passage in the Torah, or indeed any mention of the Resurrection.*

you. If they come to know of you, they will stone you, or make you return to their creed, and then you will never prosper." And so it was that We caused them to be discovered, that they might know that God's promise is true (Qur'ān 18:19-21).

Now, all of these texts indicate that the Resurrection is possible and that it will come to pass, that it is obligatory to believe in it, that it has always been a matter of contention among people, and that the Prophets ﷺ confirmed it with proofs and tangible examples. The first creation is more wondrous than the second; it is only familiarity with it as a observed reality that makes it seem less of a marvel. Suppose that we lacked this familiarity, and then we were told that a man could move around atop a woman as though churning butter until a foamy fluid emerged from him and disappeared into some part of the woman's body and remained for a while in the same state, and then became a clot, then a morsel of flesh, then bones clothed in flesh, and then began to move, and then emerged from a place from which nothing ever emerged before, without killing or even injuring its mother, then opened its eyes; and then from the mother's breast would come a liquid for it to drink that was not there before, and the child would feed on it until gradually it became an adult capable of craft and cognition. This thing that began as a drop of fluid and was the weakest of God's creatures when it is born could soon become a tyrannical king, ruling and controlling most of the world! Such a thing is far more amazing than the Resurrection, but it is natural for a person to be amazed by anything that he has not seen and whose cause is unknown to him. Wonderment is what a person feels when he witnesses something for the first time, or hears of something whose cause he does not know and of which he has never heard before.

The Balance

The soul's attachment to the body is like a veil that conceals the true nature of things from it. With death this veil is lifted: as God Most High says, *Now We have removed from you your covering* (Qur'ān 50:22). One thing that is revealed to him is the influence of his deeds in taking him nearer to God Most High or further from Him, which is the value of those deeds, and how some of them had a greater effect than others. It is not beyond the power of God to produce a cause that instantly informs all creation of the value of their deeds and the extent to which they bring them nearer to or further from Him. The definition of a balance is an instrument for differentiating surplus from deficit. In the tangible world, it is represented in different ways. There are the familiar form of balance, the scales for measuring weights, the astrolabe for measuring the motions of the spheres and telling the time, the ruler for measuring distances and lines, and prosody for measuring the values of sounds. God the Mighty and Majestic has represented the true balance to the senses with these things and with others like them, as He willed. The one true meaning of balance is found in all of them, namely "the means of differentiating surplus from deficit." Its nature is apprehended by the senses through form, and by the imagination through representative examples. God Most High knows best how to ordain the formative representation of truths; our obligation is to believe in all of it.

The Reckoning

The Reckoning is a gathering of all separate things that were decreed, and the final appraisal of their worth. There is no human being who does not have various kinds of deeds, some being beneficial, others harmful; some drawing him nearer to God, others

further from Him. Their sum total is unknown, and they cannot be counted individually. When those dispersed deeds are gathered together and their worth is calculated, that is the Reckoning. It is obviously well within the power of God Most High to reveal to all of creation their varied deeds and their worth in a single instant, and so He is truly *the Swiftest of Reckoners* (Qur'ān 6:62). The Commander of the Faithful 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, may God ennoble his countenance, was asked, "How will God reckon all humankind in an instant without any confusion or error?" He ﷺ replied, "In exactly the same way that He provides for them all, and all living things, without any confusion or error."

The Bridge

The Bridge (*Ṣirāṭ*) is real. It has been called as narrow as a hair, but that does not do it justice; it is narrower still, and its narrowness is of an entirely different order from that of hair, as is its sharpness from the sharpness of a sword. Consider the narrowness of the geometric line that separates sunlight from shadow, being neither part of the sunlight nor of the shadow. The narrowness of this line is not comparable to the narrowness of a hair; and the narrowness of the Bridge is like that geometric line, with no width to it at all. This is because it is of the same order as the Straight Path (*al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaḳīm*), which means the true middle point between opposing character traits. God makes this plain with the supplication in Sūrat al-Fātiḥa, *Guide us to the straight path* (Qur'ān 1:6), and says of the Chosen Prophet ﷺ, *Truly you guide to a straight path* (Qur'ān 42:52). The Prophet ﷺ said, "I have been sent only to perfect good character,"² and God Most High told him, *Truly you are of a tremendous character* (Qur'ān 64:4). This means such traits as generosity, which lies between extravagance and stinginess; courage, which lies between recklessness

and cowardice; and temperance, which lies between lustfulness and frigidity. These traits have extremes on both sides, the side of excess and the side of neglect, both of which are blameworthy. The middle way, neither excessive nor neglectful, is equally distant from both extremes. Therefore the Prophet ﷺ said, "The best things are the middlemost."³ That middle is like the geometric line between shadow and sunlight which is itself neither shadow nor sunlight.

The truth of this is that the perfection of the human being lies in resemblance to the angels, who are free of those opposing traits. It is not possible for a human to free himself from them completely, and so God Most High charges him with the task of being as though freed from them, even if he cannot truly be so. This is the middle. Warm is neither hot nor cold; gray is neither black nor white. Stinginess and extravagance are human qualities; a person who is temperate and generous is neither extravagant nor stingy. The Straight Path, then, is the middle between two extremes, entirely without breadth, narrower than a hair. This is why it is beyond human capacity to find it, and why the likes of us are bound to approach Hell to the extent to which we stray from it. God Most High says, *There is not one of you but shall come to it. That, for your Lord, is a decree that must be fulfilled* (Qur'ān 19:71); and He says, *You will never be able to be just to your wives, however hard you try; but do not turn altogether away* (Qur'ān 4:129). How could it be possible to love two wives exactly equally, and to find a middle point between them without inclining toward either?

The one who remains upright in this world upon the Straight Path of which God Most High tells through the Prophet ﷺ, saying, *This indeed is My path made straight, so follow it* (Qur'ān 6:153), will pass straight over the Bridge in the Hereafter without inclining to either side, because in this world he habituated himself to refraining from inclination, and so this became an innate trait of

his; habit is a fifth nature. This is a matter of certainty affirmed by Revelation; a hadith states that the believer will cross the Bridge as swiftly as lightning (Bukhārī 1338; Muslim 2870).

Paradise

The tangible pleasures that exist in Paradise such as eating, drinking, and sexual relations are a matter of doctrine that must be accepted, since they are possible [and described by Revelation]. As we saw earlier, pleasure can be tangible, imaginal, or mental.

Tangible pleasure in the Hereafter exists because the spirit is returned to the body, as we have seen. One might object that some of the pleasures described in the Tradition are things that not everyone enjoys, such as milk, silk, *thornless lote trees and clustered plantains* (Qur'ān 56:28–29). However, these are addressed to certain people who hold those things in high esteem and desire them greatly. Every class of people in every region have certain foods, drinks, and clothing that they especially favor. In Paradise, everyone will have whatever they desire; as God says, *Therein you shall have all that your souls desire, and therein you shall have all that you request* (Qur'ān 41:31). It can also be that God Most High extols certain pleasures in the Hereafter that are not particularly extolled in the world. One example of this is looking upon the Essence of God Most High, which is not something that people naturally desire or crave in the world, but they will in the Hereafter.

As for imaginal pleasure, it is manifestly possible and can be experienced in dreams, although it is considered to be lesser because it soon comes to an end. If it never ended, there would be no way of telling it from tangible pleasure, because the pleasure a person derives from forms is occasioned by their imprinting in the imagination and the senses, not by their existence external to the person. If they existed outside the person but were not imprinted in his

senses, he would not experience any pleasure from them. Conversely, if the pleasure remained imprinted in the senses but ceased to exist externally, the pleasure would endure. The imaginal faculty has the power to produce forms in this world, but the forms it produces are imaginary and not tangible, nor are they imprinted upon the visual faculty. That is why even if it produces a form of tremendous beauty and imagines that it is present and visible, it will not result in much pleasure, because the object does not become visible in the manner that it does in a dream. If a person had the power to depict the form to the visual faculty as well as the imaginal faculty, the resulting pleasure would be powerful and would seem just as real as if the form existed externally.

The Hereafter [for those in Paradise] does not differ from the world in this regard, except in the complete power to depict the image to the visual faculty. Everything that a person desires will be with him instantly. His desire will be occasioned by his imagination, and his imagination by his vision; that is, by its imprinting in the visual faculty. Should anything that he inclines to cross his mind, it will become present instantly; that is, present for him to see. This is what the Prophet ﷺ alluded to when he said, "In Paradise there is a market where forms are sold" (Tirmidhī 2550). The market symbolizes the divine subtle and all-pervading grace (*lutf*), which is the source of the power to produce forms according to one's will and to imprint them firmly in the visual faculty for as long as one wishes, so that they do not fade against one's will as dreams do in this world. This power is more extensive and more complete than the power to bring things into existence externally, because a thing that exists externally to the senses cannot be in two places at once, and if it becomes occupied and utilized by one person, it is taken away from others. The product of this imaginal power, however, is extensive beyond confinement or withholding; if a thousand people desired to see something in a thousand different

places all at once, they would see it as soon as it entered their minds, wherever they happened to be. If a thing exists external to the senses, it can only be viewed in one place. When commending the Hereafter to people, it is best to depict it in the manner that is amplest and most gratifying to the appetites; for it is not beyond God's power to make it so.

The third type of pleasure, mental pleasure, means that these tangible things are representations of mental pleasures that are not tangible. Mental pleasures are divided into many different categories, just as tangible ones are, and the tangible ones represent them, each one exemplifying a pleasure whose status among the mental pleasures is equivalent to its status among tangible pleasures. If a person dreams of greenery, running water, a beautiful face, rivers of milk, honey, and wine, trees decked with jewels and pearls, palaces of gold and silver, jewel-encrusted couches, and resplendent serving youths, an interpreter will say that this dream symbolizes different kinds of joy. He will not interpret them as all being the same, but will explain that each one represents a different kind of joy and delight; some symbolize the joy of knowledge and discovery, others the joy of power and authority, others the joy of vanquishing foes, others the joy of seeing friends. All of them share the name of pleasure and joy, but they differ in status and taste, each having a flavor different from the others. Mental pleasures should be understood in the same way, even when they are things that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived of."

All of these categories are possible; some individuals might experience all of them, while the experience of others might be limited to their aptitude. For those who are devoted to blind conformity and strict adherence to images, and for whom the paths of true realities have not opened up, these images and pleasures will be presented to them. The true knowers who think little of the world of images and tangible pleasures will be given whatever subtle joys

and mental pleasures are appropriate for them, and their desires and aspirations will be satisfied. Paradise, after all, is the place where every person gets what he desires; and if desires differ, it is only logical that mental experiences and pleasures should differ too. The divine power is more than capable of this; it is human capacity that falls short of comprehending all of its wonders. Through the intermediary of Prophethood, the divine mercy has communicated to all humankind whatever their minds are able to bear. They are obliged to believe in what they can understand, and to acknowledge that which lies beyond the limits of their comprehension regarding those things that pertain to the divine grace and cannot be apprehended by the human mind. Such things will be comprehended only *In a seat of truth, before an Omnipotent King* (Qur'an 54:55).

Seeking Intercession From the Dead

As for visiting the shrines of the Prophets and Imams, may peace and blessings be upon them all, the purpose of it is to draw spiritual replenishment from their spirits in the form of petitions for forgiveness and help. This replenishment is called intercession, and it is attained from two directions: the request for replenishment (*istimdād*) from one, and the transmission of it (*imdād*) from the other. Visiting shrines has a tremendous impact on these two pillars. The request for replenishment is the concentration of the supplicant's spiritual focus by fixing his mind upon the intercessor or the one he visits so that his entire spiritual focus is engrossed in this and his mind totally occupied by that thought. This condition will make an impression upon the spirit of the intercessor or visited person, so that this noble spirit will transmit to the supplicant the replenishment he requests.

Even in this world, when someone heads towards a person with the whole of his spiritual focus fixed upon him, the person can sense this and feel him coming, and will tell him so after he arrives. Those who no longer reside in this world are all the more sensitive to this. It is certainly possible for someone who exists outside the states of this world to be aware of some of them, just as in a dream a person might see the conditions of people in the Hereafter and whether they are being rewarded or punished. "Sleep is the brother of death," and in sleep we become capable of recognizing states that we could not descry in the waking world. Likewise, those who actually die and cross over to the Hereafter are all the more able to observe things in this world. However, their awareness does not cover every single thing that occurs in this world at all times, just as we do not see everything about the deceased in our dreams. The individual pieces of information that are observed in such moments are occasioned by certain things, one of which is the spiritual focus of the supplicant, meaning that the supplicant is entirely engrossed in the person of that noble spirit. Just as the image of a living person aids in calling him to mind and fixing one's thought on him, it is equally helpful to witness the grave of the deceased person, which is the veil over his outer shell. The effect which the deceased person has upon the soul when his outer shell is absent is not like the effect which he has when one is present at his shrine. If you imagine that you are able to call the soul of that deceased person to mind when away from his shrine as powerfully as you can when present there, you are mistaken. Presence has an obvious effect that absence cannot match.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely useless to call upon a deceased person for aid in their absence, and it can still have some effect. Consider how the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever invokes one blessing upon me, ten will be invoked upon him" (Muslim 408); "Whoever responds to the muezzin will be granted my intercession" (Bukhārī

614); and, "Whoever visits my grave will be granted my intercession."⁴ Drawing near to his outward frame, which is the most exclusive aspect of him, is a perfect intermediary by which his intercession is attained. Drawing nearer through his descendants, who are a part of him and remain so even after successive generations; or drawing nearer to his shrine, his mosque, his city, his staff, his whip, his sandal, his doorframe; or drawing nearer through his habits and his way of life; or drawing nearer through anything that had a connection with him—all of these will lead one closer to him and earn his intercession. It makes no difference whether the Prophets are in this world or in the Hereafter, except for the manner by which they are known. The instrument of knowledge in this world is the external senses, while in the Hereafter there is an instrument by which the Unseen is known, whether clothed in symbolism or direct. But the other means of drawing near and seeking intercession do not change.

Of the two sides of this replenishment, the more important is the transmission of replenishment and the attention that comes from the direction of the replenisher, even if the one who benefits from the mediation is unaware of it. If a hair of the Messenger of God ﷺ, or his doorframe or whip, were placed upon the grave of a sinner, that sinner would be saved from punishment by the graces of that relic. If it were placed in a house or a town, the residents of that house or town would be spared from tribulation by its graces, even if the residents were entirely unaware of it. The Prophet's ﷺ attention from the Hereafter is directed towards all that which is attributed to him. God Most High has allotted the repelling of calamity, sickness, and punishment to the angels, and every angel is more eager to protect those things which the Prophet ﷺ is concerned over than others, just as was the case in his lifetime. The angels are even closer to his sanctified spirit after his death than they were during his life.

It is related that Abū Ṭāhir al-Hijrī al-Qarmatīⁱ lifted a man up on his shoulders to pull the water spout off the Ka'ba, but the man died upon his shoulders and he too fell down dead. It is also related that a group of Egyptians bored a hole through the wall of the Prophet's ﷺ Rawḍa in the middle of the night with the intention of taking out his body and transporting it to Egypt, but the residents of Medina heard a disembodied voice say, "Protect your Prophet, O Muslims! Protect your Prophet!" They lit their lamps and candles and saw the hole in the wall, and a group of Egyptians lying dead around it.

It is also related that the Prophet ﷺ planted a moist tree branch in a man's grave and said, "God Most High will spare this man any punishment as long as this branch remains moist." That was thanks to the blessings of his ﷺ hands. If a person obeys and reveres a king, if he enters the king's city and sees an arrow from the king's quiver or a whip belonging to him, he will revere that city. The angels revere the Prophet, and so when they see his relics in any house, city, or grave, they revere the occupant and lessen his punishment. This is why it benefits the dead to place copies of the Qur'ān upon their graves, to recite the Qur'ān by their heads, and to write the Qur'ān on parchment and place it in the hands of the dead.



These, then, are some methods of approach for those who desire to have a rational explanation for everything found in Tradition and Revelation. The basis for all of them is that beyond the limits of what rational people can conceive, there lie matters that Revelation

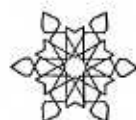
i The ruler of the Qarmatian state in Eastern Arabia who in 317/930 pillaged Mecca, killed thousands of pilgrims, and stole the Black Stone from the Ka'ba (d. 332/944).

has made known but whose true nature and meaning are known only to God Most High and to the Prophets, who are the intermediaries between God and His servants. If all the intellectuals were to come together and set their minds to discovering the cause of the special properties of the table of numbers that is used to assist in childbirth,ⁱ they would not be able to do so. How, then, should anyone hope to learn the true meaning of the things transmitted by Revelation: its commandments, prohibitions, statements, promises, warnings, and so on? The mind is weak, and its powers fall short of such wonders and special properties.

Dear brother, may God grant you a blessed life, I have offered you here as much guidance as I was able to. I counsel you and your companions to hold to faith in these things which Revelation affirms, without any hesitancy; we seek refuge with God from hesitancy! In the future, if God Most High enables me to do so, I will present you with another commentary entitled *al-Maḍnūn bihi 'alā ahlih* (Knowledge to be Withheld from the Qualified),ⁱⁱ which will be a worthier treatment of this topic than this book. This book contains some things that I have discussed elsewhere, and others that I have not. In this present *Maḍnūn* it has been my purpose to cover things that I had not covered in any of my other books, except perhaps in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences), which contains indications and allusions to things that only those who are qualified should know. God is the Helper and the Guide, and He is our sufficiency; and to Him is the final journey and return.

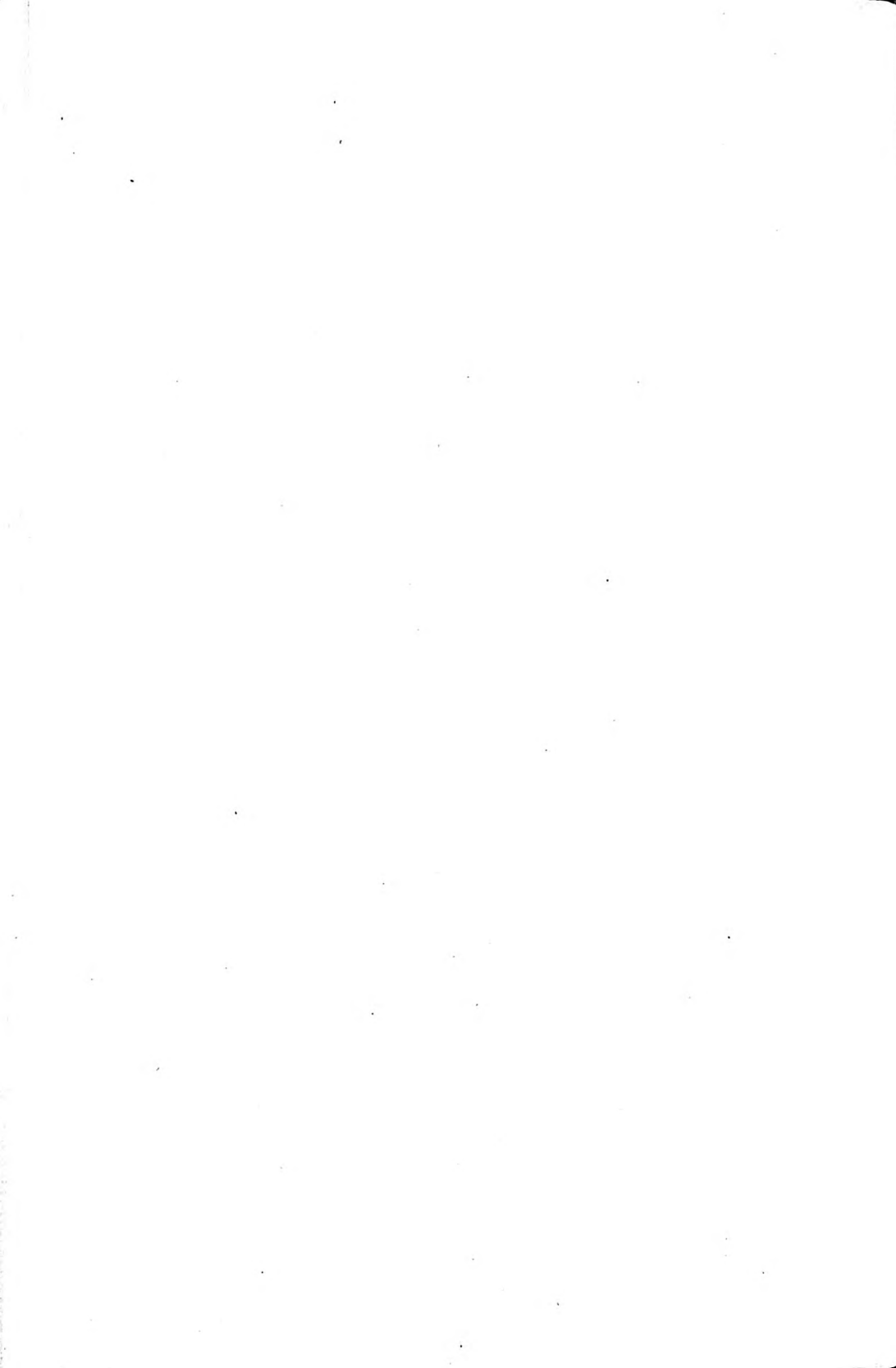
i The author describes this table in *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error).

ii This may refer to *al-Ajwiba al-Ghazālīyya fi al-masā'il al-ukhrawiyya* (Imam Ghazālī on Cosmological Questions), which is also known as the "Lesser *Maḍnūn*." Ibn Tufayl noted that several texts with this title were circulating in Andalusia in his time, but he did not consider them to be authentic works of al-Ghazālī's. See 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, pp. 156–159.



THE CRITERION OF DISTINCTION
BETWEEN BELIEF AND
UNBELIEF IN ISLAM

Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wal-zandaqa





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

I praise God Most High, surrendering to His might, awaiting the fullness of His favor, hoping for His grace and aid and that I may obey Him, seeking refuge from being forsaken by Him and disobeying Him, anticipating the downpour of His bounty. I invoke blessings upon Muḥammad His Servant and Messenger, the best of His creation, deferring to his Prophethood, aspiring to receive his intercession, complying with the right of his Messengerhood, holding fast to the grace of his innermost secret and noble character. I invoke them too upon his Family, his Companions, and all his descendants.

To proceed: Dear brother and zealous friend, I see that your heart is disquieted and your thoughts are disjointed because you have heard how certain jealous people have impugned some of our writings regarding the secrets of religious practice. They claim that these books contain things that contradict the teachings of the

forerunners and senior theologians, and that to stray so much as a hand's span from the Ash'arī school is tantamount to unbelief, and that to disagree with it on anything at all is to fall into error and ruin. Dear zealous brother, go easy on yourself and do not be disheartened. Dull your blade a little, and *Bear with patience what they say, and part from them graciously* (Qur'ān 73:10). Indeed, one might disparage those who are never envied or vilified, and think little of those who are never accused of unbelief or misguidance! For was there ever a better or wiser preacher than the Master of Messengers ﷺ himself? Yet they called him a madman! And is any discourse finer or truer than the Word of the Lord of the Worlds? Yet they called it *fables of the ancients* (Qur'ān 6:25)! Beware of becoming obsessed with debating them in the hope of silencing them, for that is a vain hope and a cry falling on deaf ears. Remember what the poet said:

You may hope to make peace with any foe,
Except one who's hostile because of envy.ⁱ

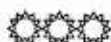
If anyone could hope to achieve that, the greatest of all men would not have received verses informing him of the fruitlessness of such an endeavor. You must be aware of the Words of God Most High: *And if their aversion weighs heavily on you, then, if you can, seek out a tunnel into the earth, or a ladder to heaven, that you may bring them a sign. Had God willed, He would have united them all in guidance; so be not among the ignorant* (Qur'ān 6:35); *And even if We were to open for them a gate to heaven through which they continued to ascend, they would say, 'Our eyes are merely dazzled. Nay, we are a folk bewitched!'* (Qur'ān 15:14-15); *And had We sent down to you a Book on parchment so they could*

i Lines attributed to Imam al-Shāfi'ī.

touch it with their hands, the disbelievers would have said, 'This is nothing but blatant sorcery (Qur'ān 6:7); Even if We sent down the angels to them, and the dead spoke with them, and We gathered all things right in front of them, still they would not believe, unless God willed. But most of them are ignorant (Qur'ān 6:111).

Know that the true meaning and definition of unbelief and faith, and the mystery of truth and error, are not disclosed to hearts that are sullied by desire and love for renown and wealth. They are revealed only to hearts that are first purified from the stain of worldly pollutants, then polished by total spiritual discipline, then illuminated by pure invocation, then nourished with correct thought, then adorned with adherence to the bounds of the Law, until light pours upon them from the niche of Prophethood so that they become like polished mirrors. The lamp of faith in the glass of the heart shines with lights; *Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, though no fire touched it (Qur'ān 24:35).* How could the secrets of the Spiritual World be disclosed to those whose god is their base desire, whose object of worship is their temporal power, whose prayer-direction is gold and silver coins, whose sacred law is their own comfort, whose ambition is focused on renown and pleasure, whose worship consists of groveling to the wealthy, whose invocation consists of paranoid misgivings, whose treasure is their political connections, and whose contemplation consists of shameless scheming for profit? How can such people hope to differentiate between the darkness of unbelief and the light of faith? Will it be by divine inspiration, though their hearts are not swept clean of worldly pollutants? Will it be by perfection of knowledge, though their knowledge consists of no more than questions relating to ritual purity and the use of saffron-water and such trivial matters? By no means! This quest is far too precious and dear to be achieved by wishful thinking or idle pursuit. Attend to your own affairs, and do not waste a moment of your time on them. *Shun him who*

turns away from Our Remembrance and desires nothing but the present life. That is the full extent of their knowledge. Truly your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way, and He knows best who is guided (Qur'ān 53:29-30).





CHAPTER 2

THE CLAIM TO SOLE OWNERSHIP OF TRUTH

As for you yourself, you and those like you are not motivated by envy or restrained by blind conformity, but rather you thirst for insight into the confusion occasioned by certain ideas and stirred by certain speculations. If you wish to uproot this weed from your heart and theirs, address yourself and your interlocutor, and ask him for a definition of unbelief. If he claims that unbelief is anything that contravenes the Ash'arite school, the Mu'tazilite school, the Hanbalite school, or any other, know that he is a deluded fool, shackled by conformity. He is blinder than the blind, so do not waste time trying to reform him. Sufficient proof to silence him would be to compare his claims to those of his rivals, for he will not be able to identify any differences between himself and those who conform to schools other than his.

Perhaps your interlocutor inclines to the Ash'ari school in particular, and claims that to differ with that school in any way whatsoever is plain unbelief. Ask him how he has established that the truth is his sole property, such that he would hurl accusations of unbelief against the likes of al-Bāqillānī,ⁱ who differed with

i A famous jurist and Ash'arite theologian (d. 403/1013).

al-Ash'arīⁱ regarding the attribution of eternity to God Most High, holding that it is not a distinct attribute of His in addition to His Essence. What reason is there to say that al-Bāqillānī is guilty of unbelief for disagreeing with al-Ash'arī, rather than the contrary? Why should the truth be the sole property of one of them and not the other? Is it simply that one was the other's predecessor? Al-Ash'arī had his own predecessors, including some of the Mu'tazilites; does that mean they were right and he was wrong? Or is it due to greater virtue and knowledge? If so, then by what standard does he measure this virtue, such that he could rightfully claim that no one in existence is more virtuous than his leader? Or, if he allows al-Bāqillānī the right to differ, why does he deny it to others? What is the difference between al-Bāqillānī and al-Karābīsī,ⁱⁱ al-Qalānisī,ⁱⁱⁱ or any other? What is the justification for allowing this exception?

He might claim that al-Bāqillānī's disagreement is not one of substance but merely semantic. Some partisans have tortuously affected to argue this, on the grounds that both al-Ash'arī and al-Bāqillānī agree that God's existence is eternal and differ only as to whether this is due to the Essence itself or to another attribute that is distinct from the Essence—which is a minor disagreement that does not call for a strenuous rebuttal. But why, then, is he so strenuous in his rebuttals of the Mu'tazilites and their denial of the divine Attributes? After all, they acknowledge that God Most High knows everything there is to be known, and has the power to do anything that is possible, and they differ with al-Ash'arī only regarding the question of whether God is knowing and powerful in Essence, or by virtue of distinct attributes. What is the

i The founder of the Ash'arite school of Sunni theology (d. 324/935).

ii A theologian and companion of al-Shāfi'ī (d. 248/859).

iii A companion of al-Ash'arī who is frequently cited in works of theology and exegesis, though no major biographical works have entries for him.

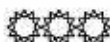
difference between these two disagreements? Is there any subject more momentous and perilous than the discussion of the affirmation or negation of the Attributes of God, the Majestic and Sublime?

He might say, "I call the Mu'tazilite an unbeliever and I strenuously rebut him because he claims that the qualities of Knowledge, Power, and Life issue from the one Essence. But these Attributes are distinct in definition and reality, and it is impossible for different realities to be united as a single thing, or for the one Essence to represent them all." Why then does he not find fault with al-Ash'ari himself for saying that God's Speech is a single attribute subsisting through the Essence of God Most High; yet though it is one, it is Torah, Evangel, Psalm, and Qur'ān; and it is command, prohibition, statement, and inquiry? After all, these are certainly different realities. How could they not be, when the definition of a statement is something that can be believed or disbelieved, while this is not true of commandments or prohibitions? How could a single reality be at the same time both subject to belief and disbelief, and also not subject to them? That would mean that affirmation and negation applied to the very same thing.

If he fumbles about for an answer to this or is unable to shed light on it, know that he is not an intellectual but a conformist; and the conformist ought neither to speak nor to be spoken to, since he is unqualified to tread the path of argumentation. Were he qualified, he would be a leader, not a follower; an imam, not a disciple. If the conformist engages in debate he is overstepping his bounds, and to indulge him is like hammering cold iron or trying to freshen spoiled food. If time has spoiled something, can a perfumer put it right again?

If you are honest, you will see that if someone makes truth the sole province of a given intellectual, he is closer to unbelief and contradiction: unbelief because he is raising that person to the level of infallible Prophet, assent to whom is required by faith

and dissent with whom means nothing less than unbelief; and contradiction because every intellectual requires consideration and forbids conformism. How could an intellectual say, "You must conform to me," or, "You must engage in thought, provided that your conclusions agree with mine! If I deem an argument sound, you must deem it sound; if I doubt it, you must doubt it"? What is the difference between one who says, "Conform to me in my school alone," and one who says, "Conform to me in my school and in my proofs as well"? Is this not a contradiction?





CHAPTER 3

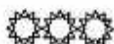
THE DEFINITION OF UNBELIEF

Having been shown the contradictions of the factions of conformists, perhaps you desire to know the definition of unbelief. It requires a long explanation and can be difficult to grasp because of its abstruseness. But I will provide you with an authentic standard to apply and judge by, so that you may remain focused and avoid hurling accusations of unbelief against all and sundry, or speaking ill of the people of Islam, even if their ways are contrary, as long as they hold to "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God," and believe in it without contradicting it.

I say, then, that unbelief (*kufr*) is to deny anything that the Messenger ﷺ conveyed, and faith (*īmān*) is to believe everything that he conveyed. The Jew and the Christian are unbelievers because they deny the Messenger ﷺ. The Brahmin is all the more an unbeliever since he rejects all the other Messengers as well as

our own. The materialistⁱ is all the more an unbeliever since he rejects our Messenger, all other Messengers, and the Sender of Messengers Himself.

This is because unbelief is a legal designation (*hukm shar'i*), like slavery and freedom, since it carries the penalty of death as well as eternal condemnation to Hell. There are legal means for establishing it: it can be established by an explicit text (*naṣṣ*) or by analogy with an explicit text. There are explicit texts regarding the unbelief of Jews and Christians, and *a priori* that of Brahmans, dualists, infidels, and materialists, all of whom have in common that they deny the Messenger ﷺ. Anyone who denies the Messenger is an unbeliever, and every unbeliever denies the Messenger. That is the criterion to judge by.



i The word used is *dabrī*, literally "eternalist," or "believer in time," as in Q. 45:24: *And they say, 'There is only our life in this world. We die and we live, and nothing but time destroys us.'* In *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*) the author defines this group as "a faction of the ancients who denied the existence of the All-Knowing, Omnipotent Creator and held that the world has always existed and always will, of its own power and without a creator, and that animal has always come from seed, and seed from animal, in an eternal cycle. Such people are devoid of faith."



CHAPTER 4

THE LEVELS OF EXISTENCE

Although what we have said so far may seem obvious, there is more beneath the surface—indeed, what is most important lies there. Every faction accuses its rivals of unbelief and of denying the Messenger ﷺ. The Hanbalite calls the Ash'arite an unbeliever because, so he claims, he denies what the Messenger taught about God Most High being "above," and settling upon the Throne. The Ash'arite calls the Hanbali an unbeliever because, so he claims, he likens God to creation and denies what the Messenger taught about how *nothing is like unto Him* (Qur'ān 42:11). The Ash'arite calls the Mu'tazilite an unbeliever because, so he claims, he denies what the Messenger taught about the possibility of seeing [God], and how God possesses knowledge, power, and other attributes. The Mu'tazilite calls the Ash'arite an unbeliever because, he claims, affirming the divine Attributes would imply that there are several beginningless beings, thereby denying what the Messenger taught about divine Oneness.

The only way to escape this quandary is to learn the proper definitions of "denial" and "belief," and what they really mean. This will show you how extreme these factions truly are, and how recklessly they brand one another as unbelievers.

I say, then, that belief (*taṣḍīq*) can apply to the statement, or to the one who makes it. Its true meaning [for our purposes] is to acknowledge the existence of what the Messenger ﷺ stated to exist. However, there are five levels of existence, and it is ignorance of them that causes each faction to accuse the others of denial. Existence can be ontic (*dhātī*), sensory (*ḥissi*), imaginal (*khayālī*), intellectual (*ʿaqlī*), or analogical (*shibhī*). Someone who admits the existence of something the Messenger ﷺ stated to exist on any of these five levels is not guilty of "denial" in an absolute sense. Let us explain these five levels and give examples of how they are employed in figurative interpretation.

Ontic existence is true, concrete existence; it is external to the senses and the mind, but the senses and the mind receive an image of it, the process being called "perception." This includes the existence of the heavens and earth, or animals and plants. It is the most immediate meaning of "existence," and for most people it constitutes the only thing meant by the term.

Sensory existence means that which is represented in the visual faculty of the eye, though it has no existence external to the eye. It exists only in the senses, and only for the beholder and no other. This includes the things that a person sees while asleep, or the things a sick person might see while awake. Forms appear to them that have no existence outside their own sense-perception, and they may appear as real to them as all the other things they see which actually do exist externally. In fact, the Prophets and saints may behold, while awake and in perfect health, beautiful images representing the substance of angels, through which revelation and inspiration is conveyed to them. In the waking world, they encounter things of the Unseen that others can only receive in dreams. This is due to the purity of their inner beings; as God Most High says, *Then We sent to her Our Spirit, and it appeared before her in the form of a perfect man* (Qurʾān 19:17).

Another example of this is that the Prophet ﷺ saw Gabriel ﷺ many times, but only saw him in his true form twice. On other occasions he saw him in different forms that he took on. Another example is that the Messenger of God ﷺ can be seen in dreams; and he said, "Whoever sees me in a dream sees me in truth, for Satan cannot take on my form" (Muslim 2268). This does not mean that his person is actually transported from the *Rawḍa* in Medina to the location of the sleeping person; rather, it means that his image is presented to the senses of the person. This is due to a secret that would be long in the telling; I have explained it in some of my other works. If you are not prepared to believe it, then at least believe your own eyes. If you take an ember in your hand with a dot of flame in it, and then rapidly move it in a straight line, you will see a fiery line in the air. If you move it in a circle, you will see a fiery circle. The line and the circle are visible and they exist in your senses, but not outside them, for all that exists outside your senses is the dot at all times. It becomes a line and a circle due to certain successive motions. The circle never exists at all at any one particular instant, yet you behold it as though it did.

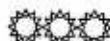
Imaginal existence refers to the image of these objects of sense when they are absent to your senses. Even when you close your eyes, you are able to conjure up the image of an elephant or a horse in your imagination, as if you were actually looking at it. Its image is fully present in your brain, but not outside it.

Intellectual existence means that a thing has a certain aspect which constitutes its true spirit, nature, and significance, and the intellect isolates this significance without its image being established in the imagination, the senses, or the external world. Take, for example, the hand. It has an outer form that can be apprehended by the senses and the imagination, but it also has an inner significance, which is its true nature: the power to grasp and to strike. The power to grasp and strike is therefore the intellectual

hand. The pen too has an image, but its true nature is that it is the instrument for recording knowledge. The intellect can conceive of this nature in isolation, without needing it to be contextualized by the image of reed, wood, or any other imaginal or sensory form.

Analogical existence means that the thing itself does not exist in image or in nature, whether in the external world, the senses, the imagination, or the intellect; but something else does exist that resembles it in a certain property or attribute. You will understand this when I give you some examples of its employment in figurative interpretation.

These, then, are the levels of the existence of things.





CHAPTER 5

THE LEVELS OF FIGURATIVE INTERPRETATION

In the case of ontic existence no examples are needed, since this refers to the outward meaning. It is not interpreted figuratively, since it is real, absolute existence. These include the Messenger's ﷺ teachings about the Throne, the Footstool, and the seven heavens, which are all to be taken literally and not interpreted, being bodies that exist in themselves whether they are perceived by sense and imagination or not.

There are many examples of the use of sensorial existence in figurative interpretation, of which two can suffice. The first is the statement of the Messenger of God ﷺ, "Death will be brought forward on the Day of Resurrection in the form of a black and white ram, and slaughtered between Paradise and Hell" (Bukhārī 4730). Anyone who is rationally convinced that death is an accident—or the absence of an accidentⁱ—and that it is impossible for an accident to be transformed into a substance, will interpret this Tradition to mean that the people at the Resurrection will witness this and believe that the ram is death. But that will exist

i If death is defined as the absence of life.

in their senses alone, not in the external world; its purpose is to make them certain that there will be no more death ever again, since when a thing has been slaughtered it is over and done with. Anyone who is not rationally convinced by this, however, is free to believe that death will actually be transformed into a ram and then slaughtered.

The second example is the statement of the Messenger of God ﷺ, "Paradise was displayed to me upon the surface of this wall" (Bukhārī 540). If one is rationally convinced that bodies cannot occupy the same space, and that the smaller cannot contain the larger, one will take this to mean not that Paradise itself was transported to that wall, but rather that its image was represented to the senses upon the wall, as though he could see it. It is perfectly possible for the image of something larger to be observed upon something smaller, such as how the sky may be observed in a small mirror. This observation was something more than simply the imagination of the form of Paradise, for there is a difference between seeing the sky in a mirror and closing one's eyes and imagining the sky in the mirror.

An example of imaginal existence is found in the Prophet's ﷺ words, "It is as if I could see Jonah son of Amittai, wearing two striped garments, calling out, 'At your service!,' and the mountains responding, and God Most High saying to him, 'Here I am, Jonah!'"¹ This is obviously a description of an image that was presented to his ﷺ imagination, since the event took place, and had long since ceased to exist, before the Messenger of God ﷺ existed. It would not be far-fetched to suggest that the image was also presented to his senses, so that he witnessed it just as the sleeping person witnesses a dream. However, his words "It is as if I could see" (*ka-annī anzur*) suggest that he did not actually see it but did experience something akin to seeing it. In any case, my purpose is to give an example, not to focus on this particular

image. In sum, anything that can appear to the imagination could conceivably appear to the senses, which would make it an act of beholding. Or one could say: if something is able to be imagined, it is unlikely to be rationally impossible for it to be seen.

There are many examples of intellectual existence, of which again two will suffice. The first is his ﷺ statement, "The last one to come out of Hell will be given a share of Paradise ten times the like of this world" (Bukhārī 6571). This implies outwardly that he will have ten times the like of it in length, breadth, and area, for that is how the sense and the imagination would understand the disparity. Yet someone might object incredulously, "Paradise is in heaven, as many texts plainly state. How could heaven contain the world tenfold, when the heaven is part of the world?" Someone schooled in interpretation would bypass this difficulty by saying that the disparity meant is on the level of signification and intellection, not of sense or imagination. For example, one might say that a jewel is ten times the equal of a horse—in the sense of monetary value and significance as perceived by the intellect, not of size as perceived by sense and imagination.

The second example is his ﷺ statement, "God Most High kneaded Adam's clay with His Hand for forty mornings."² This affirms that God Most High has a hand. A person who is rationally convinced that it is impossible for God to possess a hand that is a limb perceptible to sense or imagination would affirm that God the Sublime possesses a spiritual and intellectual hand. In other words, he would affirm the significance, nature, and spirit of the hand, not its image; for the spirit and significance of the hand is that which grasps and acts, gives and withholds. God Most High gives and withholds by the mediation of His angels; as the Prophet ﷺ said, "The first thing God created was the Intellect, saying,

"With you I give, and with you I withhold."ⁱ This cannot mean the intellect in the sense of an accident, as the theologians believe, for the first thing to be created cannot have been an accident. Rather, it must mean the essence of a given angel who is named "intellect" because of his ability to apprehend things with his substance and essence without requiring knowledge. Or perhaps he could be named "Pen" in the sense that he is the means by which aspects of knowledge are inscribed upon the tablets of the hearts of Prophets, saints, and other angels through revelation and inspiration. For another hadith tells us that the first thing God Most High created was the Pen (Abū Dāwūd 4700). If this does not mean the intellect, the hadiths would be contradictory. It is possible for a thing to have several names, on account of its different aspects: it could be named "intellect" in the aspect of its essence, "angel" in the aspect of its relation to God Most High as a mediator between Him and creation, and "pen" in the aspect of its attribution to the activity of inscribing knowledge by inspiration and revelation. Likewise, Gabriel is called "spirit" in the aspect of his essence, "trusted" in the aspect of the secrets entrusted to him, "vigorous" in the aspect of his capability, "one of awesome power" in the aspect of the perfection of his power, "eminent before the Lord of the Throne" in the aspect of his close standing with God, "obeyed" in the aspect of the subordination of certain other angels to him.ⁱⁱ

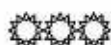
Whoever subscribes to all this affirms the existence of pen and hand in an intellectual sense, not a sensory and imaginal sense. The same applies to someone who takes the position that the hand is

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- i Ibn Hajar says in *Fath al-Bārī* (6/289) that this hadith is unsupported by any chain of transmission. Suyūṭī narrates it in *al-Jāmi' al-kabīr* on the authority of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī from "several of the Companions."
 - ii It is nothing less than revelation revealed, taught to him by one of awesome power, possessed of vigor (Qur'ān 53:4-6); Truly this is the word of a noble Messenger, powerful, eminent before the Lord of the Throne, obeyed there, trusted (Qur'ān 81:19-21).

an expression of a certain Attribute of God's, whether power or another, which is the subject of disagreement among theologians.

Examples of analogical existence include anger, yearning, joy, patience, and other such things which sources have attributed to God Most High. The nature of anger, for instance, is the boiling of blood in the heart out of desire for satisfaction. This is by definition a defect and a kind of pain. A person who is rationally convinced that God Most High cannot possibly feel anger in an ontic, sensory, imaginal, or intellectual way will therefore interpret it as being another attribute that produces the same thing that anger produces, such as the desire to punish. And although that desire is not linked to anger in its essential nature, it is linked to it in that it pertains to a certain attribute which accompanies it, and an effect which is produced from it, namely the infliction of pain.

These, then, are the levels of figurative interpretation.





CHAPTER 6

THE MEANING OF DENYING THE LAWGIVER

Know that anyone who interprets any statement made by the Lawgiver on any of the aforementioned levels is numbered among those who believe in the truth of that statement. Denial means to reject all of these interpretations and to claim that the statement is meaningless and simply false, and that the motivation behind it was to deceive or to gain some worldly benefit. This is pure unbelief and atheism. Those who engage in figurative interpretation are not guilty of unbelief as long as they adhere to the rules of interpretation, as we shall elaborate. Why should interpretation be tantamount to unbelief? After all, there is no faction among the Muslims that does not have to resort to it sometimes. The furthest man from figurative interpretation was Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal رحمہ اللہ; and the type of interpretation most exoteric and farthest removed from literalism is to treat a statement as allegory or metaphor, which pertain to intellectual and analogical existence. Yet a Ḥanbalite is bound to do just that, for I have heard trustworthy Ḥanbalite imams in Baghdad say that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal رحمہ اللہ gave explicitly figurative interpretations for just three hadiths. The first was the Prophet's ﷺ statement, "The Black Stone is God's Right Hand upon earth."¹ The second is, "The believer's heart is between two

of the All-Merciful's fingers" (Muslim 2654). The third is, "I feel the breath of the All-Merciful coming from Yemen."²

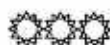
Consider how he interpreted the first of these hadiths because he was rationally convinced that its literal meaning was impossible. He observed that it is customary to kiss a person's right hand to show devotion to him, and that the Black Stone is also kissed in devotion to God Most High, so it is akin to a right hand for Him—not with respect to the Attributes of His Essence, but in a circumstantial way—and therefore it was called a right hand. This is what we have called analogical existence, which is the most far-removed form of interpretation; yet see how even the most reluctant of all people to engage in interpretation was compelled to resort to it. Likewise, because he found it inconceivable that God Most High could have two fingers perceptible to the senses, since anyone who inspects his own chest will not see two fingers there, he interpreted it to mean the "spirit" of fingers, meaning intellectual and spiritual fingers. What I mean by the "spirit" of fingers is the function of manipulation. The human being's heart is between the influence of the angel and the influence of the devil, by means of which God Most High turns hearts this way and that. That is why he alluded to them as fingers.

The reason Ahmad ibn Hanbal رحمہ اللہ engaged in figurative interpretation of these three hadiths alone was that they were the only ones which he deemed could not possibly be taken literally. This was because he was not well-versed in intellectual speculation, for otherwise he would have been aware of many other occasions for interpretation, such as the attribution of the direction of "above" to God and other such matters for which he did not engage in interpretation. The Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites delved deeper, which is why they went beyond this and engaged in interpretation to a much greater extent.

When it comes to eschatological matters, those nearest to the Hanbalites are the Ash'arites, may God grace them with success, for they take most of what the Tradition relates about the Hereafter literally, with only a very few exceptions. The Mu'tazilites are more given to it, though even the Ash'arites are compelled to interpret certain things figuratively, such as the report we discussed earlier about death being brought forth in the form of a ram and slaughtered, as well as the Traditions about deeds being weighed in the Balance. The Ash'arite takes the weighing of deeds figuratively to mean that the pages upon which the deeds are recorded will be weighed, and that God will assign weight to them according to their level. This is having recourse to the far-flung domain of analogical existence, since pages are physical bodies upon which are written symbols that conventionally represent deeds, which are accidents. That means that what is weighed is not the deeds themselves, but rather the material on which symbols conventionally denoting the deeds are written.

The Mu'tazilite, for his part, interprets the Balance itself figuratively, and says that it symbolizes the means by which everyone will be informed of the value of their works. This is actually less contrived than the figurative interpretation that posits the weighing of pages. But my purpose is not to say which interpretation is correct, but only to show you that although every faction may do its best to adhere to the literal meaning of the Tradition, it will be forced to resort to figurative interpretation sooner or later, or else to cross the bounds into absurdity and willful ignorance by asserting that the Black Stone is literally God's Right Hand; that although death is an abstract contingent entity it will be transformed into a ram by transfiguration; or that although actions are abstract entities that may be non-existent, they will be transported into the Balance and then be endowed with accidental entities of their

own, namely weight. To stray so far into ignorance is to break free of reason altogether.





CHAPTER 7

THE RULES OF INTERPRETATION

You know by now that all factions agree upon these five levels of interpretation, and that nothing in them amounts to denial. They also agree that such interpretation may only be resorted to when it is established that the literal meaning of the text cannot possibly be the intended one. The primary literal meaning is the ontic level; if it is established, the others are not needed. If that is not possible, then next comes the sensory level; if it is established, the others are not needed. If that is not possible either, then next comes the imaginal or intellectual level. If neither are possible, then next comes the analogical allegorical level. It is not permitted to move from one level to the next unless rational proof demands it. What this means is that the differences of opinion in this matter boil down to rational proofs. The Hanbalite says that there is no rational proof that it is impossible for the Creator to be designated the direction "above." The Ash'arite says that there is no rational proof that to see God [in the Next World] is impossible.

It seems that each party is dissatisfied with what the other says because they do not deem it decisive proof. In any case, no party is justified in accusing the other of unbelief simply because they deem them to be mistaken regarding rational proofs. By all

means, they may say that the others are in error or heretical—in error because they deem them to have strayed from the path, and heretical because they deem them to have innovated a position that the righteous early Muslims never espoused. It is well-known that the early Muslims believed that God Most High can be seen, and so to say that He cannot be seen is heretical innovation (*bid'a*), and so is explicitly stating that the vision of God must be interpreted figuratively. If someone believes that this vision means only beholding with the heart, he must not state this aloud or speak of it, since the early Muslims did not do so.

At this juncture the Hanbalite might well speak up, saying, "It is also well-known that the early Muslims affirmed that God is 'above,' and none of them said that the Creator of the world is neither attached to nor detached from the world, neither within nor outside it. They did not say that the six directions do not pertain to Him, or that calling Him 'above' is like calling Him 'below.' That is an innovation, for innovation means to say something that the early Muslims are not known to have said."

From this it will have become clear to you that there are two positions in this regard. The first is that of the masses of humanity, for whom the truth lies in following the way of the early Muslims and completely avoiding questioning the literal meaning of the Tradition. This means being careful not to innovate any assertions of figurative interpretation that the Companions did not themselves make. It means closing the door on asking questions about such matters, and discouraging any engagement in theological speculation or probing of ambiguous passages in the Qur'ān or the Sunna. Thus it is related that when 'Umar رضي الله عنه was asked about two verses of the Qur'ān that seemed to contradict each other, he struck the questioner with his whip. Or consider how Mālik,ⁱ when

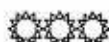
i Founder of one of the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence (d. 179/795).

asked about God's settling upon the Throne, replied, "The settling is known, but the 'how' is unknown. Believing in it is a duty, and asking about it is innovation."

The second position is that of the more thoughtful individuals who encounter difficulty understanding the doctrines they have inherited from the tradition. Such people should engage in speculative enquiry only when the need arises, and go beyond the literal meaning of the text only when they are compelled to by decisive rational proof. Nor should they accuse their fellows of unbelief if they deem them to have erred in what they consider to be decisive proof, for that is by no means a small matter that is easy to ascertain. They ought to hold to a common standard for establishing rational proofs on which they all agree. If they cannot agree on a balance by which to weigh such matters, they will not be able to settle their disputes. I have described five such balances in my book *The Just Balance (al-Qistās al-mustaqīm)*. It is inconceivable that anyone who understands them could dispute them. All who understand them acknowledge that they are the means by which certainty is achieved. Those who master them will find it easy to dispense and attain justice, to uncover truth, and to settle disputes. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that they might disagree. This may be because one of them does not quite grasp all of the balance's requirements, or because they regress into instinct and disposition rather than employing the balance, like a person schooled in prosody who falls back on his innate sensibility because he finds it too much trouble to conform fully to the meter of every poem, and thus is not unlikely to make mistakes. Or it may be because they disagree on the facts that constitute the premises of rational proofs, for the facts that form the basis for these premises can be empirical, anecdotal by mass transmission (*tawātur*), or of another kind. People differ regarding these, for what one person considers to be mass-transmitted another person may not, and one person

may have an experience that another does not. Or it may be because of a confusion between conjecture and rational fact, or between commonly-held belief and axiomatic truth, as I have explained in detail in *The Touchstone of Reason* (*Mihakk al-nazar*).

In sum, once they learn and master these balances, they will be able to readily identify where errors occur, as long as they are prepared to relinquish their stubborn pride.





CHAPTER 8

FIGURATIVE INTERPRETATION BASED ON CONJECTURE

Some people are overeager to engage in figurative interpretation at the least suspicion, even when there is no compelling reason to do so. One should not, however, rush to pronounce *takfir*ⁱ upon such a person in every instance. Rather, one should examine his case; if his figurative interpretation does not concern any of the doctrinal fundamentals and principles of religion, he should not be accused of unbelief.

An example of this is how a certain Sufi claimed that the account of Abraham the Friend ﷺ seeing the star, moon, and sun, and saying, "This is my Lord"ⁱⁱ is not meant literally, but that in fact he saw

i *Takfir* means to accuse another of unbelief.

ii *Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those possessing certainty. When night darkened around him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I love not those that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely become one of those who are astray.' Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greater!' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, truly I renounce the partners you attribute to God. Truly I have turned my face to Him Who originated the heavens and the earth, as a man of pure faith; and I am not of the idolaters.'* (Qur'ān 6:75-79).

luminous angelic substances whose luminosity was intellectual, not sensory, and that calling them "star," "moon," and "sun" was a symbol of their differing degrees of perfection, which mirrored that of those celestial bodies. That Sufi justified this notion on the grounds that it would be improper to believe that a man of the caliber of Abraham عليه السلام could believe a corporeal object to be a god, and only relinquish that belief upon witnessing it set. If it had not set [so he argued], would he have continued to take it as a god, as if he did not know that a physical body with a limited size cannot possibly be a god? He also asked how it could be possible that the first thing Abraham saw was the star, when the sun is more prominent and is the first thing to be seen? He also cited the fact that God Most High says, *Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those possessing certainty*, and then relates this account. [The Sufi] asked how it is possible that he could have entertained such a notion after being shown the dominion.

Now all of these arguments are in fact based on conjecture, not reason. His argument that Abraham was of a higher caliber is dubious because it is said that he was still a young child when this event occurred, and it is not unlikely that such a notion might occur to a child who is destined to become a Prophet, only for him to progress beyond it soon afterwards. Nor is it unlikely that he may have understood that an impermanent object cannot be divine before he understood that a physical object likewise cannot be. As for seeing the star first, it is said that in his childhood he was confined to a cave and only came out at night. As for the argument that God Most High says, *Thus did We show Abraham...* firstly, it is possible that God is describing the final outcome of the event first, and then telling it from the beginning afterwards.

All of these arguments, then, are examples of conjecture being mistaken for rational proof by someone who does not know what

a rational proof really is, nor what it requires. That is the nature of their [improper] figurative interpretations. They even came up with interpretations for the staff and the sandals in God's Words, *Take off your sandals, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwā* (Qur'ān 20:12) and *Cast what is in your right hand* (Qur'ān 20:69). Perhaps such speculation is excusable when it does not pertain to matters of fundamental doctrine, just as rational argument is admissible in doctrinal matters, and so there is no need to level accusations of unbelief or heresy. However, if opening this door leads to the hearts of the masses becoming confused, those who engage in it may be charged with heresy when their views have no precedent in the teachings of the early Muslims.

Another example is that some esoterists say that the Golden Calf should be interpreted figuratively, since how could there not have been, among all those people, a single intelligent person who knew that a golden statue cannot be a god? This is also conjecture, for it is by no means impossible that a large group of people could end up in such a state; after all, idol-worshippers do exist. The fact that something is unlikely does not make it impossible.

On the other hand, when this kind of conjecture is applied to vital matters of doctrine, it becomes necessary to pronounce *takfir* upon anyone who alters the literal meaning of a text without decisive rational proof. This means such things as denying the bodily resurrection or physical punishment in the Hereafter because of speculations, suppositions, and objections that are not founded on decisive rational proof. *Takfir* must absolutely be pronounced on the proponents of such, because there is no rational proof that it is impossible for spirits to be returned to bodies. To state otherwise causes great harm to the religion, and it is therefore necessary to pronounce *takfir* upon all who attach themselves to it, which includes most philosophers. This pronouncement is also necessary upon those who say that God Most High knows only Himself,

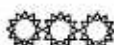
or that He knows only universals but does not know particulars associated with individuals. To say such things is without doubt to deny the truthfulness of the Messenger ﷺ, and it does not fall within the parameters of the levels of interpretation we discussed above. The Qur'ān and Traditions are so replete with proofs of the bodily resurrection, and of God Most High's knowledge of the particulars pertaining to every individual, that there is simply no room for figurative interpretation.

In any case, the people who espouse such beliefs admit that they are not figurative interpretations at all. Rather, they say that it is in the interest of people to believe in bodily resurrection because their minds are unable to conceive of a resurrection that is purely mental, and that it is likewise in their interest to believe that God Most High knows everything about them and is watching over them, in order to instill hope and awe in their hearts. Therefore, so they say, the Messenger ﷺ was permitted to tell them such things; for it is not really lying to tell someone something untrue if it is in his best interest to believe it. Now this claim is entirely false, for it amounts to explicitly calling the Messenger a liar and then offering the excuse that he was not really lying. The rank of Prophethood must be held above such base notions. Truthfulness is sufficient to see to mankind's best interests, and there is no reason to resort to deceit.

That is the first level of infidelity (*zandaqa*), constituting a level between Mu'tazilism and outright infidelity. The approach of the Mu'tazilites is close to that of the philosophers except for one thing, which is that a Mu'tazilite does not admit the notion that the Messenger could engage in deceit upon such pretexts, but instead interprets according to the literal meaning when he deems it rationally necessary to do so. The philosopher, in contrast, does not restrict his own transgressions of the literal meaning to those

matters where there is justification for figurative interpretation, whether reasonable or remote.

Outright infidelity means to deny the Resurrection altogether, whether on the intellectual or sensory level, and to deny that the Creator of the world exists at all. As for admitting that there will be some kind of resurrection, but only a mental one that does not involve sensory pain or pleasure; and as for admitting the existence of the Creator while denying His knowledge of particulars—this constitutes infidelity that is qualified by a certain kind of acknowledgment of the truthfulness of the Prophets. It seems to me—and God knows best—that such people are the ones meant in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ, “My Community will split into seventy-something sects, all of them in Paradise except the infidels, who are one sect.” This is how the hadith is worded in some narrations.ⁱ The literal meaning of this hadith is that he meant the infidels from among his own Community, given that he said, “My Community.” Someone who does not acknowledge his Prophethood at all would not be counted as one of his Community; and those who deny the Resurrection and the Creator altogether certainly do not believe in Prophethood; they claim that death is simply oblivion, and that the world has always existed of its own right without any Creator. They do not believe in God and the Last Day, and they consider the Prophets to be charlatans, and so they cannot be counted among the Community. Therefore, “the infidels of this Community” can only mean [the qualified infidelity] that we have just described.



i ‘Uqaylī, *al-Du‘afā’ al-kabīr* 1964. The hadith is much more commonly known with the wording “seventy-three sects, all of them in Hell except one.”



CHAPTER 9

OUTRIGHT INFIDELITY

A comprehensive explanation of what entails unbelief and what does not would require a long and detailed discussion that examined every opinion and school of thought, all their assertions and proofs, and the ways in which they justify departing from the literal meaning and engaging in figurative interpretation. That would fill a great many volumes, and my time does not allow it. For the time being, we must make do with a word of advice and an axiom.

The advice: to the best of your ability, restrain your tongue from [accusing] the people who hold to the Qibla so long as they say, "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" and do not contradict these confessions of faith. By "contradict" I mean asserting that it is possible for the Messenger of God ﷺ to have engaged in deceit of any kind, whether justified or not. Accusing others of unbelief is a dangerous matter, while holding one's tongue presents no danger.

The axiom: You must know that speculative matters are of two kinds. One concerns the fundamentals of doctrine, the other secondary matters. There are three fundamentals of faith: belief in God, in His Messenger, and in the Last Day. Everything besides these is secondary. Know also that accusations of unbelief may not

be leveled for secondary matters, except for one thing, which is denial of any tenet of religion that is known from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ by mass transmission. However, even here it may be a case of simple error, as in matters of jurisprudence, or else heretical innovation, such as issues relating to the Caliphateⁱ or the status of the Companions.

Errors concerning the Caliphate, whether regarding the claim of a given individual to it, or the qualifications for it, or anything else, do not justify accusations of unbelief. Ibn Kaysānⁱⁱ denied that the Caliphate is obligatory at all, but that does not mean he ought to be called an unbeliever. No heed should be paid to those who venerate the office of Caliph to such an extent that they make faith in the Caliph equal to faith in God and His Messenger, nor to their rivals who call them unbelievers merely because of their views regarding the Caliphate. All of that is excessive, for neither opinion amounts to accusing the Messenger ﷺ of deceit. It is the accusation of deceit that spells unbelief, even in secondary matters. If someone were to say, for example, that the Holy House in Mecca is not the Ka'ba to which God Most High enjoins that pilgrimage be made, this would be unbelief, since the contrary is established by mass transmission from the Messenger of God ﷺ. If he were to argue that the Messenger never attested to that House being the Ka'ba, this argument would not avail him. It would be obvious that his denial was simply stubbornness, unless he were a recent convert to Islam who had not yet come to know of this mass-transmitted fact. Likewise, if someone accused 'Ā'isha ؓ of indecency

i Here and in the passage that follows, the author uses the term *imāma*, which is more readily translated as "Imamate," but here seems to refer to both the Sunni concept of the Caliph and the Shi'ite concept of the Imam.

ii A Mu'tazilite theologian and jurist (d. 200/816).

even though the Qur'ān itself absolves her of it,ⁱ he would be an unbeliever. This is because to assert such things necessarily entails accusing the Messenger of deceit or else denying mass-transmitted fact. One may deny a mass-transmitted fact with his tongue, but he cannot ignore it with his heart.

Certainly it is another matter to deny something that is known by the report of a single lone narrator. It is not unbelief to do so, even if it amounts to a denial of something held by consensus to be true, since the status of consensus as decisive proof is a somewhat imprecise matter, as experts in juridical fundamentals know well. Al-Nazzāmⁱⁱ denied that consensus is a valid proof at all, which means that the status of consensus as a valid proof is itself a matter of dispute. Such is the status of secondary issues.

But as for the three fundamentals and all those things that are established by mass-transmission and do not countenance figurative interpretation, nor are they conceivably refutable by rational proof—to contradict them is simply to give the lie to them. Examples of these include the bodily Resurrection, Paradise and Hell, and God's knowledge of particulars, as we have seen.

When it comes to those texts for which figurative interpretation is possible, even if that interpretation be far-reaching and allegorical, one must examine the rational evidence. If it is decisive, it must be asserted; but if making it known to the masses would cause harm because of their inability to understand it, then to make it known would be a heretical innovation. If the rational evidence is not decisive but still yields a probable opinion, and if it would not cause harm to the religion, such as the Mu'tazilite's denial of the

i *Truly those who brought forth the lie were a party amongst you. Do not suppose that it is bad for you; rather it is good for you. Every one of them incurred his part in the sin; and he who bore the greater share of it shall have a terrible punishment* (Qur'ān 24:11).

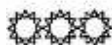
ii Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. ca. 230/845) was a versatile scholar and author who founded his own theological school.

vision of God, then it is heretical innovation but not unbelief. As for something that does seem to pose harm, it is up to independent judgment (*ijtihād*) and speculative enquiry to determine whether it constitutes unbelief or not.

An example of this is the claim made by some self-styled Sufis that they have reached such high standing with God Most High that they are no longer obliged to pray and are permitted to drink wine, engage in sin, and accept money from a ruler. Such a person must undoubtedly be put to death, though it is a matter of debate as to whether they are destined for an eternity in Hell or not. Putting such a person to death is better than slaying a hundred unbelievers, for the harm he poses to the faith is more grave, and he opens a door to licentiousness that might never be closed. Indeed, he is more harmful than someone who simply preaches licentiousness, since most people would not listen to the latter because of his patent unbelief. The false Sufi destroys the religion from within, and yet he claims that he has done no more than make some exceptions to the general rule. He deems that the general rules of religious responsibility apply only to those of a lesser spiritual rank than him; he may even claim that he sins only outwardly, while his inner being is innocent. This encourages any iniquitous person to claim the same, and thus the grip of religion is loosened.

One should not suppose that whether *takfir* is applicable or not is something that can be known with certainty in every situation. *Takfir* is a legal designation that entails liability to the loss of property and life, as well as being condemned to Hell for eternity. Its basis is the same as that of all other legal designations: sometimes it is known with certainty, other times it is strongly suspected, other times it is doubtful. When there is doubt, it is better to refrain from *takfir*. Rushing to *takfir* is the way of those who are predisposed to ignorance.

Another principle must be underscored here, which is that it can happen that a person contradicts a mass-transmitted text and claims that he has a figurative interpretation for it, but the interpretation he advances has no basis whatsoever in language, whether far-fetched or reasonable. This is simply unbelief, and its proponent is giving the lie to Revelation, even if he claims to be interpreting it. One example of this that I have personally witnessed is that a certain Bāṭinite says that God Most High is One in the sense that He bestows and creates oneness, Knowing in the sense that He bestows and creates knowledge, and Existent in the sense that He existentiates others; but He is not Himself One, Knowing, or Existent in the sense that they are attributes of His. This is patent unbelief, because taking "oneness" to mean "the existentiating of oneness" is no kind of valid interpretation, nor does the language of the Arabs allow it. If the Creator of oneness were called "One" because He created oneness, then He would also be called "Three" and "Four" because He created those numbers too. Such statements are denials disguised as interpretations.





CHAPTER 10

INVESTIGATING A PRONOUNCEMENT OF UNBELIEF

You will have understood from these examples of *takfir* that investigating an accusation of unbelief involves certain matters.

The first is the question of whether or not the text whose literal meaning has been rejected is open to valid figurative interpretation; and if it is, then is that interpretation reasonable or far-fetched? It is not a simple matter to determine whether or not a text accommodates figurative interpretation. None may do so but the most perceptive and well-versed experts on the Arabic language and its foundations, and on the ways in which the Arabs traditionally employ metaphor, allegory, and figures of speech.

Secondly, there is the question of whether the rejected text is affirmed by mass transmission, by a solitary report, or simply by consensus. If it is affirmed by mass transmission, does it meet the requirements of that status, or not? A text that is merely widely-known (*mustafid*) may be mistaken for one that is mass-transmitted. Mass transmission means something that cannot be doubted, such as knowledge of the existence of the Prophets, well-known countries, and other such things. It must also [in the present context] have been mass-transmitted through the ages, one after the

next, all the way from the time of the Prophet. Is it conceivable that it may have fallen short of the level of mass transmission in any particular age? For a text to be considered truly mass-transmitted the answer to that question must be "no," as is true of the Qur'ān. For texts other than the Qur'ān, it is very difficult to ascertain this. Such a task is the preserve of those who devote themselves to the study of the books of history, the accounts of bygone ages, the books of hadith, and appraisals of narrators and their motives for transmitting what they did. This latter point is essential because it is possible for the required level of mass transmission to be achieved in every age, yet for the text in question still not to be reliable, since it is conceivable that a large number of people had cause to conspire together, especially in order to advocate for their school of thought. That is why you see extremist Shi'ites claiming that there is a text affirming the right of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib عليه السلام to the Caliphate, this being mass-transmitted among them because they have conspired to advocate for their false claims, whereas many things to the contrary are mass-transmitted among their adversaries.

As for relying on consensus, it is one of the most difficult things to establish, since it requires that all the people qualified to pronounce on the matter (*ahl al-ḥall wal-'aqd*) must gather together in one place and reach an explicit unanimous agreement on something, and then continue to agree on it—for a time, according to some, or until the end of that generation, according to others. Or the ruler may send letters throughout the lands collecting legal edicts from them at one time, with all their statements being in explicit agreement, such that it would be impossible for any of them to rescind or disagree thereafter. Even if this were achieved, it is still debatable as to whether someone who disagreed with their consensus later would be guilty of unbelief. Some would say that if it was valid for them to disagree in that era, it means that their agreement was no more than a coincidence, and there was

nothing to prevent any of them from rescinding his assent later on. This too is highly uncertain.

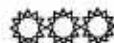
Thirdly, there is the question of whether the person who issues the opinion is aware that the text is mass-transmitted or a matter of consensus. When a person is born, he has no notion of what is mass-transmitted, nor does he know what is subject to consensus from what is disputed. He only comes to know such things gradually, particularly by reading books about the disputes and agreements of the early Muslims. Even reading one or two such books is not enough to attain thorough knowledge of what is agreed to be mass-transmitted. Abū Bakr al-Fārīsī,ⁱ may God have mercy on him, authored a work on matters of consensus which was subjected to much criticism and disagreement. If a person rejects a matter of consensus because he is unaware that it is such, the most that one can say is that he is ignorant and mistaken. He does not give the lie to Revelation and so he cannot be accused of unbelief. It is no easy feat to achieve mastery of this subject.

Fourthly, there is the question of what evidence has convinced the person to depart from the literal meaning of the text. Does it meet the requirements of rational proof, or not? The way to ascertain the requirements of rational proof would also take many volumes to explain. In *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm* (*The Just Balance*) and *Mihakk al-naẓar* (*The Touchstone of Reason*) I have given some examples. Most of the jurists of this age do not have the aptitude necessary to satisfy the requirements of rational proof exhaustively. Yet this is necessary knowledge, for it is permissible to engage in even far-flung figurative interpretation provided that the proof is convincing. If it is not convincing, no interpretation is permissible except that which is intuitively plausible.

i A jurist of the Shāfiʿī school (d. ca. 341/952).

Fifthly, there is the question whether or not the opinion poses serious harm to the religion. If it does not pose serious harm it is more excusable, even if the opinion itself be ridiculous and patently false. For example, the Twelver Shi'ites say that the Imam is occulted in a vault, awaiting the moment to reemerge. This is obviously false, absurd, and ridiculous, but it does not pose harm to the religion; its harm is limited to those who are foolish enough to believe it, for every day they leave their homes expecting to receive the Imam, and then return home disappointed. But this is merely an example; the point is that although all such absurdities are false, they are not cause for leveling the accusation of unbelief.

Once you understand that investigating the charge of unbelief involves all these five considerations, which even the most prominent scholars have not mastered individually [in their entirety], you will see that rushing to level charges of unbelief against anyone who disagrees with the Ash'arites—or with anybody else—is pure ignorance and folly. Why should a jurist be equal to this tremendous undertaking simply because he is schooled in law? What branch of jurisprudence covers these matters? If you see a jurist whose expertise is limited to legal matters indulging in accusations of unbelief and misguidance, turn away from him, and do not waste your heart or your tongue on him. The temptation to wield knowledge as a weapon is an instinctive part of human nature, and ignorant people are unable to resist it. That is why there is so much disagreement among people. If only those devoid of knowledge would keep out of such matters, disagreement would be rare.





CHAPTER II

THEOLOGY AND THE ORDINARY MUSLIM

Among the most extreme and excessive of all people are those theologians who level accusations of unbelief against the Muslim masses, claiming that anyone who does not know theology as they do, or understand doctrine by the proofs that they have established, is an unbeliever. Firstly, they are guilty of narrowing the scope of God's vast mercy upon His servants, and of claiming Paradise as the preserve of a small group of theologians. Secondly, they have ignored mass-transmitted teachings of the Sunna. They ought to know that in the time of the Messenger of God ﷺ and the Companions رضي الله عنهم, many uncivilized Bedouins converted to Islam fresh from idol-worship without ever engaging in the study of rational proofs, which they would not have understood even if they had done so; yet they were recognized as true Muslims.

The notion that faith is defined by theology, abstract proofs, and systematic categorizations is a perfect example of heretical innovation. On the contrary, faith is light that God casts into the hearts of His servants, a free gift of guidance from Him. Sometimes it arises from a sign within a person which he cannot express, sometimes from a dream, sometimes from simply witnessing the state of a religious man and bathing in his light while in his company. And

sometimes it may be occasioned by an unexpected event. A Bedouin once came to the Prophet ﷺ with the intention of rejecting and condemning him, but when his eyes fell upon his radiant figure—may God ever increase its honor and nobility—he saw the lights of Prophethood flashing forth from it, and he said, “By God, this is not the face of a liar!” Then he asked him to acquaint him with Islam, and converted. Another man once came to him ﷺ and said, “I ask you in the Name of God: did God send you as a Prophet?” He ﷺ replied, “Yes, by God! God sent me as a Prophet.” The man took him at his word, and converted (Bukhārī 63).

There are countless similar examples. None of these converts engaged in the study of theology or rational proofs; rather, on such occasions the light of faith shone into their hearts, dazzling and bright, and then continued to grow brighter as they witnessed other tremendous events, read the Qur’ān, and purified their hearts. I would like to know when it was ever related that the Messenger of God ﷺ or the Companions رضي الله عنهم summoned a convert Bedouin and told him, “The rational proof that the world is temporal is that it is never devoid of accidents; and if something is never devoid of temporal things, it must itself be temporal. Also, God Most High is Knowing and Powerful by the attributes of knowledge and power respectively, which are additional to His Essence, being neither Him nor other than Him,” and so on down through the theologian’s catalog of doctrines.

I do not mean to say that such words were never uttered, or that such concepts were never discussed using other terms with the same meaning. But the fact is that with every military campaign, groups of uncivilized men converted to Islam beneath the shade of swords, and prisoners of war converted one by one, whether after an extended time or immediately upon being captured; and as soon as they uttered the Testimony of Faith, they would be taught

how to pray and pay zakat, and then sent back home to continue their lives as herders or what have you.

Nor do I deny that the rational proofs of the theologians can be a means for some people to acquire or secure their faith; but that is by no means the only way, and moreover it is rare. Usually more is achieved with the language of homily and counsel, such as is employed in the Qur'ān. The discourse employed by the theologians produces, in the souls of the audience, a feeling that the cunning arts of debate are being used to dumbfound the common man, which does nothing to prove that what is being asserted is actually true. Indeed, it may even make his heart even more resistant. This is why in the debating halls of the theologians or jurists, you never see people converting from Mu'tazilism or heresy to another position, nor from the school of Shāfi'ī to that of Abū Ḥanīfa or vice versa. Such conversions happen by other means—even by warfare. This is why it was not the way of the early Muslims to employ such arguments in their preaching. Rather, they spoke strongly against those who indulged in theological speculation and busied themselves with idle theorizing and questioning. If we were to set aside any considerations of tact and politeness, we would go so far as to say that engaging in theology ought to be deemed unlawful due to its many drawbacks, except in the case of two [kinds of] people.

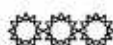
The first is a person whose heart harbors a doubt that cannot be assuaged by the simple language of homily, nor by a report transmitted from the Messenger of God. It may be that a systematic theological argument will dispel his doubt and cure his sickness, in which case it should be used. But it must not be exposed to the ears of those who are healthy and do not suffer from that sickness, since that might produce confusion in their souls and give rise to doubts that plague them and tamper with their sound and certain convictions.

The second is a person possessed of sound intelligence, a firm footing in religion, and sturdy faith aided by the lights of certitude, who wishes to learn this art so that he may help others who are plagued with doubts, or refute a heretic when he emerges, or guard his own beliefs if a heretic should try to delude him. The study of this skill for that purpose is a communal obligation, while to learn enough of it to dispel any doubts and confusions that one may harbor is a personal obligation, in the event that there is no other way of regaining one's convictions.

The simple truth is that any person who firmly believes in what the Messenger ﷺ taught and what the Qur'ān contains is a believer, even if he does not know the rational proofs for it. In fact, faith attained by theological proof is very weak and liable to collapse under the least doubt. The firmest faith is the faith of the masses, which either develops in their hearts from childhood, through total immersion in its environment, or is attained in adulthood through experiences that cannot be expressed. This faith is fully confirmed through consistency in worship and remembrance. When worship becomes so ingrained in a person that he attains true realization of God-consciousness, inner purity from the pollutants of the world, and perpetual remembrance of God Most High, the lights of gnosis are disclosed to him, and things he once believed by blind conformity become as real to him as if he could see them with his own eyes. That is the true meaning of gnosis (*ma'rifa*), which cannot be attained until the bonds of doctrineⁱ are undone and the breast is expanded by the Light of God Most High: *Whomever God desires to guide, He expands his breast for submission* (Qur'ān 6:125); *he follows a light from his Lord*

i This is a play on words: *i'tiqād*, "doctrine," comes from the root *'aqada*, "to tie a knot." Imam Ghazālī means that once the heart acquires inner certainty of truth, merely theoretical acceptance of doctrine appears restricted in comparison. A similar idea appears in the same author's *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*.

(Qur'ān 39:22). When asked the meaning of this "expansion" the Messenger of God ﷺ replied, "It is a light that God Most High casts into the heart of the believer." When asked what the sign of this light is, he replied, "To shun the world of delusion, and turn towards the world of eternal life."¹ This tells us that a theologian who desires the world and pursues it with all his power does not know the true meaning of gnosis. If he did, he would spurn the world of delusion altogether.





CHAPTER 12

THE VASTNESS OF GOD'S MERCY

You might respond at this juncture, "You say that unbelief means to deny the texts of revelation. Yet in fact it is not the theologian who narrows the scope of the divine mercy upon mankind, but the Lawgiver ﷻ himself, who said, 'God Most High will say to Adam ﷺ on the Day of Resurrection, "Adam, bring out the party of Hell from your progeny!" He will say, "Lord, how many?" He will reply, "Nine hundred and ninety-nine from every thousand" (Muslim 379). Or again, he ﷻ said, 'My Community will divide into seventy-some sects, only one of which will be saved.'"

The answer to this is that the first hadith is authentic, but it does not mean that they are unbelievers damned to Hell for all eternity. Rather, they will enter Hell and be exposed to it, and then depart from it after a duration determined by their sins. Only one person in a thousand is protected from sin altogether. Thus God Most High says, *There is not one of you but shall come to it* (Qur'ān 19:71). Also, "the party of Hell" means those who deserve Hell on account of their sins but who could be saved from the path to Hell by intercession, as is described in the Tradition. This is supported by the many reports attesting to the vastness of the mercy of God Most High, which are numerous beyond counting.

One such report is that of 'Ā'isha, may God be well pleased with her, who said: "One night I noticed that the Prophet ﷺ was missing. I went looking for him, and found him praying in his hut. I saw three lights on his head. When he had finished praying, he said, 'Who is there?' I replied, 'It is 'Ā'isha, O Messenger of God.' He said, 'Did you see those three lights?' I replied, 'Yes, Messenger of God.' He said, 'A visitor came to me from my Lord, bearing the good news that God Most High will admit seventy thousand of my Community into Paradise without reckoning or punishment. Then in the second light another visitor came to me from my Lord, bearing the good news that for every one of those seventy thousand, God Most High will admit another seventy thousand of my Community into Paradise without reckoning or punishment. Then in the third light another visitor came to me from my Lord, bearing the good news that for every one of those multiplied seventy thousand, God Most High will admit another seventy thousand of my Community into Paradise without reckoning or punishment.' I said, 'Messenger of God, surely your Community will never reach such numbers!' He replied, 'Your numbers will be made up by including Bedouins who never fasted or prayed.'"¹

There are many such narrations illustrating the vastness of God's mercy. They refer to the Community of Muḥammad ﷺ alone, but I say that the divine mercy must encompass many other Communities of old, even if most of them will be exposed to Hell, perhaps only for a short while—a moment or an hour, or whatever duration would justify them being called the "party of Hell." Indeed I would go so far as to say that most of the Byzantine Christians and Turks of this age will be embraced in this mercy, God willing. By this I mean the people in remote parts of Byzantium and Anatolia who have not heard the message [of Islam]. These people consist of three categories. First there are those who have never heard the name of Muḥammad ﷺ at all; they are excused. Then there are

those who have heard his name and description, and the miracles he performed, because they live near the lands of Islam and mix with Muslims; they are the true unbelievers. The third category sits between the first two, and consists of those who have heard the name of Muḥammad, but have not heard his description and attributes; on the contrary, from childhood they have heard that there once lived a deceitful liar named "Muḥammad" who claimed to be a Prophet, just as our children hear that there was once a liar named Muqaffaⁱ who falsely claimed to be a Prophet. To my mind, this group are like the first group. Although they have heard his name, they have received a description of him that is diametrically opposite to the truth; and that does not motivate them to investigate the matter any further.

As for the second hadith about the one saved sect, it has been narrated in divergent ways. One narration has "only one of them will be ruined," but the other version is better known. Even so, the meaning of "saved" is that they will not be exposed to Hell or require intercession; for a person seized by the Guardians of Hell and dragged towards the flames cannot be called "saved" in an absolute sense, even if he is then pulled from their clutches thanks to intercession. Another narration says, "All will be in Paradise, except for the infidels, who are one sect." It could be that all the versions are authentic, and that the one ruined sect is the one that will spend eternity in Hell, in which case "ruined" here means "having no hope of being set right;" for once something is ruined, there is no hope of any good ever coming to it again. In that case, the one saved sect would be those who enter Paradise without reckoning or intercession. To endure the Reckoning is itself a kind of torment, and so anyone who endures it cannot really be called

i A Persian author (d. 142/759) said to have composed his own pseudo-scripture to rival the Qur'ān.

"saved." Likewise, those who must rely on intercession are humbled by that fact, and so they are not "saved" in an absolute sense either.

These, then, are two levels which describe the very best and the very worst of humanity; and between them are all the other sects. Some will be tormented by the Reckoning alone, others by approaching Hell and then being diverted by intercession, others by entering Hell and then being removed from it after a duration determined by their erroneous beliefs and heresies or the extent of their sins. As for the ruined sect from among this Community who will remain in Hell forever, it consists of those who deny Revelation and assert that the Messenger of God ﷺ was permitted to tell lies for expediency's sake.

As for the other communities, those who deny the Prophet after hearing the mass-transmitted accounts of his emergence, his qualities, and his miraculous feats—the cleaving of the moon, the glorification of stones in his palm, the flowing of water from between his fingers, the miraculous Qur'ān which challenged and defeated all masters of rhetoric—if they hear of all this and turn away from it without investigating, reflecting, or seeking to confirm it, then they are simply deniers and unbelievers. This does not include most of the Byzantines and Turks who live far from Muslim lands. What is more, I say that if a person hears of all this, he will inevitably be motivated to investigate further to discover the truth of the matter, if he has any kind of religious sensibility at all and is not merely one of those who prefer the worldly life to the Hereafter. If he is not so motivated, it can only be because he is content with this world and is bereft of God-fearing and religiosity, which is the definition of unbelief. If he does feel that motivation but does not act on it, that too is unbelief. Anybody who believes in God and the Last Day, whatever his religious affiliation may be, cannot possibly be lax in investigating after learning of how such things were communicated by miraculous, supernatural means. If

he begins investigating in earnest but then dies before completing his enquiry, he will also be forgiven and will partake in that vast mercy. One must always remember that God's mercy is vast, and avoid judging divine matters by conventional standards.

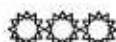
Know that the Hereafter is close to the world: *Your creation and your resurrection are as but a single soul* (Qur'ān 31:28). Most people in the world enjoy well-being and safety, or live in desirable circumstances. If invited to choose between their present lives and death or annihilation, for instance, they would choose life. It is rare for a person to be so tormented that he wishes for death. Just so, those who will remain in Hell forever will be rare compared to those who will be saved from it or brought out of it eventually. The divine Mercy does not change through circumstance; this world and the Hereafter are nothing but modes of change in your own circumstances. Were that not so, it would have been meaningless for the Prophet ﷺ to say, "The first thing God inscribed in the First Book was: 'I am God; there is no god but I. My mercy outstrips My wrath. Whoever bears witness that there is no god but God, and that Muḥammad is His Servant and Messenger, shall have Paradise.'"ⁱ

Know also that the precedence and inclusiveness of the divine Mercy is revealed to those possessing inner vision through various means and unveilings, besides the Traditions and reports known to them; but it would take too long to elaborate on that here.

Rejoice, then, in the mercy of God and in absolute salvation, as long as you combine faith with righteous works; but beware of absolute ruin if you are altogether devoid of them. If you have certainty as to your fundamental belief in Revelation but you make errors in your interpretations, or harbor doubts about either, or combine good deeds with evil ones, then do not expect absolute

i Daylamī, *Musnad al-firdaws* 1.

salvation. It may be that you will be punished for a time and then released, or it may be that someone will intercede for you, whether it be the one whose every teaching you believe to be certain truth, or another. But strive in the hope that God will relieve you, by His grace, of the need for intercession from anyone; for it is perilous to rely on such a hope.





CHAPTER 13

UNBELIEF IS DEFINED BY REVELATION

Some people think that the designation of unbelief (*takfir*) is based on reason rather than on Revelation, and that one who knows God is a believer while one who is ignorant of Him is an unbeliever. They should be informed that a death sentence and eternal damnation in Hell is a legal designation, which is meaningless prior to the pronouncement of Revelation. If what they mean is that the Lawgiver has implied that anyone who is ignorant of God is an unbeliever, then this definition is not exhaustive, because someone who is ignorant of the Messenger and the Hereafter is also an unbeliever. If they went further and specified that it means ignorance of the Essence of God Most High through denying His existence or His Oneness, and did not extend this to His Attributes, they might find support for this position. But if they went further and said that anyone who errs regarding the Attributes too is ignorant or an unbeliever, they would be compelled to pronounce *takfir* upon those who deny the Attributes of Eternity or Beginninglessness; those who deny the Attribute of Speech as distinct from Knowledge; those who deny Hearing and Seeing as distinct from Knowledge, those who deny the possibility of seeing God; those who affirm that He has direction; and those who affirm that He has a temporal will

that does not subsist in His Essence or in any other locus; and they would have to pronounce *takfir* upon all who differ regarding these questions. In sum, they would have to pronounce *takfir* for every issue relating to the Attributes of God Most High, which would be a baseless ruling. If they said that it applied to certain Attributes but not others, they would have no grounds for this distinction.

The only workable definition is that unbelief means denial of Revelation, since this encompasses denial of the Messenger and the Hereafter, and excludes those who engage in figurative interpretation. It is likely that ambiguous cases will arise which necessitate investigating whether a given statement is a valid interpretation or simply denial, especially when the interpretation is counter-intuitive. Such cases must be judged by recourse to opinion and independent judgment; for, as you are well aware, this is a matter that calls for independent judgment.

Others say, "I pronounce *takfir* on those who pronounce it on me, and not on those who do not." This is an untenable position. Suppose that someone says, "‘Alī ؑ was the rightful Caliph, and those who say otherwise are wrong and guilty of unbelief." He cannot be ruled an unbeliever for this, for his assertion about ‘Alī is not itself unbelief, and his judgment about others is an error regarding a legal matter. Likewise, if a Hanbalite is not guilty of unbelief for asserting that God exists in physical space, he does not become an unbeliever by saying that those who deny that assertion are guilty of denial and invalid interpretation.

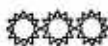
It is true that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "If one Muslim accuses another of unbelief, then it is true of one of them" (Bukhārī 6103). But what that means is, "if he calls him an unbeliever despite knowing that he is not." If a person knows that someone believes in the truthfulness of the Messenger of God ﷺ and yet calls him an unbeliever anyway, it is the accuser who becomes the unbeliever. If, however, he accuses him because he suspects that

THE CRITERION OF DISTINCTION

he denies the Messenger then he has made an error of judgment about a particular person, believing him to be an unbeliever and a denier when in fact he is not; and such an error of judgment is not in itself unbelief.



In reiterating these points to you, we have made you aware of the most important aspects of this principle, as well as the rule that should be followed therein. Be content with this. Peace!





ENDNOTES

DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR (*Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*)

Chapter 1: Sophistry and the Denial of All Knowledge

- 1 Hākim, *Mustadrak* 7863.
- 2 Ṭabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 2856.

Chapter 2: The Classes of Seekers

- 1 Ibn al-Muqri', *Mu'jam*, 475.
- 2 As told in Q. 18.

Chapter 3: The True Nature of Prophethood, and All Humankind's Need for It

- 1 Suyūṭī, *Ṣaghīr* 8472.

THE JUST BALANCE (*al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*)

Chapter 8: Muḥammad ﷺ and the Learned of His Community Suffice in Place of Any "Infallible Imam", and the Truthfulness of Muḥammad ﷺ Can Be Known by the Method of the Knowers of God, Which Is Clearer and More Evident Than the Consideration of Miracles

- 1 See Qur'ān 20:87-89.

Chapter 9: Humanity's Path to Deliverance From the Darkness of Disagreement

- 1 Bazzār, *Musnad* 6339.

KNOWLEDGE TO BE WITHHELD FROM THE UNQUALIFIED (*Al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ghayr ahlih*)

Chapter 4: What Comes After Death

- 1 Ibn Abi Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Mawt*, as cited by al-'Irāqī in *al-Mughnī*.
- 2 Bayhaqī, *Sunan* 20782.
- 3 Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab* 6176, as a saying of the Follower (*Tābi'i*) Muṭarrif, although it is commonly cited as a hadith.
- 4 Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab* 3862.

THE CRITERION OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN BELIEF AND UNBELIEF
IN ISLAM (*Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wal-zandaqa*)

Chapter 5: The Levels of Figurative Interpretation

- 1 Daylamī 4881; a similar report is found in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 166.
- 2 Al-ʿIrāqī attributes this hadith to al-Daylamī in *Musnad al-firdaws*.

Chapter 6: The Meaning of Denying the Lawgiver

- 1 Tabarānī, *Awsaṭ* 563.
- 2 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 6358.

Chapter 11: Theology and the Ordinary Muslim

- 1 Ḥākim, *Mustadrak* 7863.

Chapter 12: The Vastness of God's Mercy

- 1 Ibn Ḥajar in *Fath al-Bārī* (11/411) attributes this hadith to a narration of al-Kalābādhi in *Maʿāni al-akhbār*.

